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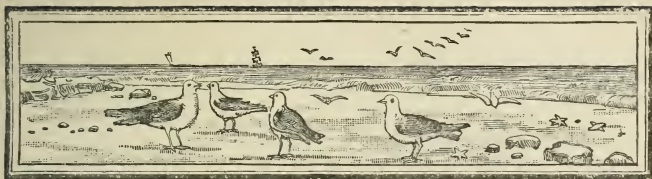
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Mrs. Sher presents
her Compliments to
Sir Philip Smyly,
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accepting a copy of
her new book.

11 Sandford Ave.

May 21st 1894

IF MEN WERE WISE.



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IF MEN WERE WISE.

CHAPTER I.

SWANNECK, or Swan-neck—so called from a fancied resemblance in the bend of the lake at this point to the curve of a swan's neck—was a settlement consisting of less than a dozen log-houses, all built pretty closely together, as if for companionship in that wild and lonely region.

The settlers were all men of small capital, who had embraced the Government offer of land, at almost nominal price, to those whose courage was equal to the task of clearing

the primeval forest, and whose means were sufficient to await the result.

The first party of emigrants who arrived naturally regarded themselves as pioneers. They were, consequently, not a little surprised to find one solitary man settled down there already, with all the evidences of long residence around him.

This man had only cleared his "lot" sufficiently to allow of a house being built. A strong, compact little log-house it was, and "beautiful for situation." Illimitable forest enclosed it behind and on either side. The front was open to the lovely lake, with its wooded islands and rocky inlets, surrounded by the "intermingled pomp of vale and hill;" the whole being engirt and overshadowed by the mountains, their bleak scarped summits and rugged pine-clad slopes forming an august background to the fair scene.

His boat and canoe were drawn up upon

the shingly margin. A large dog ran to and fro. Birds were hung about in wicker cages. Above the doorway, painted in red and black old English characters, ran the legend, "*Le château d'un pauvre Diable.*"

Thus was he found, and there any day he might be seen, this *pauvre diable* who exercised the minds and stirred the curiosity of the newly arrived "homesteaders." A strong sinewy man of thirty or so was he. Pleasant to look upon, and friendly in speech, he had the manner and bearing of a gentleman, the flavour of the Old World still clinging to him amid his wild surroundings.

All that jocund spring and bounteous summer the axe and hammer were never silent in Swanneck. Men wrought from sunrise until twilight ushered in swift darkness, all shaping and perfecting the habitations henceforth to become home, and wrestling with nature in her most savage form. From one mighty overthrow she should arise, re-

cast in a softer mould, to be wooed and won for themselves, to their souls' peace and bodies' comfort.

The *pauvre diable*, who delved not and toiled not, but lived as the lilies of the field, looked on, his sympathetic interest tempered by a fond regret. His own lot was secure to him. They could not touch the broad belt of sighing pine trees which encircled his dwelling. But they could hack and hew until daylight flooded those dim forest aisles where not a footfall could be heard on the soft springy earth. They could level those fair "upland lawns," and grow the corn of commerce thereon. Above all, they could utilize and vulgarize those lovely islands in the lake, where—in a stillness that penetrated to the very soul, with the moonlight silvering the mossy crag above his head, and throwing a pearly splendour across the scintillating water—he had lain with his gun beside him, unable to use it, to

disturb that holy serenity by its report and echo, or to deal death among the wild shy creatures of the wilderness, secure in their tranquil solitudes. He came and went, watching the work go forward without remark, advice, or criticism. He had not wanted these neighbours to disturb his seclusion, but since they had come and must stay, he opened his heart to receive them, and philosophically made the best of a bad bargain; while the more they saw of him and his manner of life, the more they regarded him with suspicion.

Among half a dozen men there is always one man who forges ahead to assume the place of leader, keeping it by his dominant will, whether such arrangement is agreeable to his fellows or not.

Such a man in Swanneck was McFarlane, a raw-boned Scotchman, whose hair and freckled face were the colour of hay, and whose eyes were the colour of his freckles.

He wore a fringe of beard, but shaved around his mouth, as if to show that chiselled feature, which looked like a line cut in wood. He had a keen eye to the main chance; a hatred of waste, want of method, or levity. A methodical, sober-minded, careful body was he, who could not bear that his own soul should go to waste, and was religious accordingly, digging about and fertilizing the roots of his spiritual life, that in due season it might bring forth fruits having marketable value when the profitable chafferings of this life were ended with him.

In the second year of his settlement at Swanneck, it was borne in upon him that the rising generation of young Swanneckers were like to be a sad race of runagates, and he began to talk impressively of some way of educating them. Long before this his soul had been vexed within him by want of what he called the "Lord's ordinances," and every one's soul had been grieved

who had been compelled to listen. His proposal was that a minister should be brought from some of the towns eastward, his stipend to be made up among them, partly in money and partly in kind. But when he came to canvass the settlers, he encountered much opposition.

He was a Presbyterian himself, and firmly believed all other sects were more or less contaminated by impure doctrine. His neighbour Fanshawe, a staunch churchman, utterly disdained to nail his flag to the Westminster Confession. In an access of Episcopalian fury, he even declared his willingness to see himself damned rather than bring another Presbyterian prater into the place—an evidence of his want of sympathy with “that stream of tendency, not our own, which makes for righteousness.”

The Morgans and Penrhyns were Methodists. Morgan, indeed, had done a little exhortation of the itinerant sort at home in

Wales ; and, albeit a modest man in private life, in public could "engage in prayer" with astonishing power. Perhaps it was the presence of such gifts in himself that made him look coldly upon McFarlane's proposal. Brennan and Duffy, two young Ulstermen who farmed their lot between them, were both Presbyterians and hot Orangemen ; but, their religion being political rather than spiritual, they were useless as supporters. Eugene Bord, who "ran the store," was a French Canadian and a Catholic. A good-humoured man was he, and heard attentively all McFarlane had to say, but applied the thumb and outstretched fingers of his hand to his nose when he was gone.

So the minister never came. Still McFarlane was a man whom opposition merely stimulated. His first failure only made him more determined to carry his point in the second undertaking. Like most of his countrymen, he had a great belief in the

necessity for education—a belief which may contribute in no small degree to their success in life.

Accordingly, by keeping the subject to the front, a one-roomed log-hut was built and dignified by the name of “school-house.” Then in the spring, having occasion to go down to New Westminster on business of his own, McFarlane was deputed to bring back with him the new “schoolmarm.”

Greatly to his satisfaction, he found the very thing he wanted. A newly arrived young Englishwoman was sojourning with friends of his own—the Reverend David McIntyre and his wife—good solid Scotch folks, who could warrant their young *protégée* as thoroughly steady, competent, and reliable.

“We know her history, and shall be only too glad if we can help her,” they said; and an agreement was quickly concluded.

The day on which McFarlane arrived with the new teacher—or rather the day

following — was a red-letter day in the annals of Swanneck. It was the first Sunday in April, and all nature seemed to have put on its brightest smile to welcome Mary Ford.

For some time past the little school-house had been used as a place of worship. Hymns were sung and prayers offered; but everything in the way of homily or exhortation was by common consent excluded. The only one who had held aloof from these services was Lawrence Wrayburn, the solitary man in the château by the lake. He was consequently reputed to be a “free-thinker;” as the settlement now prided itself on its piety, and approved not such laxity.

On this calm day of cloudless skies and vernal breezes, all Swanneck, prinked in its very best, turned out to the afternoon service, full of curiosity to see the brand-new harmonium, and the educational exotic the

indomitable McFarlane had transplanted to the wilderness.

Miss Ford, who had given her age as twenty-five, was a slim young woman of middle height, with rather more than the average share of good looks. Her features were regular; she had expressive eyes, and an abundance of fair hair. But all these advantages were more than neutralized by the extreme paleness and undue gravity of her face. Ill health or sorrow had faded her prematurely. She was pensive and interesting, but not beautiful. Not a suggestion of nervousness ruffled her quiet dignity, or disturbed her rather cold serenity. She bore with perfect composure the raking gaze of the small congregation. When the hymn was given out, she rose quietly from her place beside Mrs. McFarlane, and seated herself at the new harmonium.

The hymn was the well-known "Hark, my soul! it is the Lord." When the rough

voices of the men joined the shrill, attenuated notes of the women, and both chimed in haltingly with the humming drone of the harmonium, Mary thought she had never heard so unmelodious a performance. It was useless to try and pull them together. Accustomed to lead themselves, they could not follow her lead, and the results were perfectly excruciating.

Yet, to any one taking a less superficial view, there was a touch of pathos, and even of sublimity, in the unpretentious ritual of this humble band, who had sunk their paltry sectarian differences to unite in acknowledging the God who made them, and offer their simple worship. This was the view taken by one who stood at the end of the room, and who presently struck in with a clear and powerful baritone, its tutored and harmonious tones guiding and compelling the other wavering voices. One or two, looking round, saw that it was the free-thinker Wrayburn,

standing without a book, and evidently singing from memory.

As the music ended, Mary Ford turned her sedate glance in his direction. After twelve hours' residence, she, believing she had come to the end of all Swanneck had to offer, took fresh courage as her weary eyes noted the small oasis of superiority his appearance presented in this desert of laborious industry.

After service came the grand ceremony of presentation, when every man, woman, and child came forward to be introduced to Miss Ford.

The idle spirit of scornful curiosity had led Lawrence Wrayburn thither to take a satirical survey of McFarlane's latest fad. Having surveyed her, and seen what manner of woman she was, he felt conscious of a certain shame and disinclination to wait for an introduction. But, as he turned to pass out, it occurred to him that it would look

uncourteous to shirk making her acquaintance, and be the only one in Swanneck who failed to give her a respectful greeting. So he, in his turn, was presented, shaking hands as the others did, and offering a few conventional words of welcome.





CHAPTER II.

GRADUALLY the little congregation melted away. Only McFarlane remained to put away books, shut windows, and lock the door. Wrayburn, who had lingered to examine the new harmonium, at length sat down and began to play "I know that my Redeemer liveth" with an accurate memory, but with hands that, from want of practice, had lost some of their precision. McFarlane drew near, key in hand.

"Aw did not knaw ye wor a museesican, Mr. Wrayburn," he said.

"Nor am I, when I've nothing to play

upon," the other answered. "Don't let me detain you. Leave the key, and I'll lock up when I've done amusing myself. I suppose there's no objection?"

"Surely not—surely not! But are ye no' comin' to th' tea-drinkin'?"

"What tea-drinking?"

"Th' whole kit o' them's comin' to oor hoose th' nicht to tak' tea in honour o' Miss Ford."

"I should not have thought a sabbatarian like you would countenance such festivities."

"There's *no* festeevity, Mr. Wrayburn," McFarlane answered solemnly; "nor should Aw consent to sech. But folks maun git their supper somewhaur, and we a' tho't we might as weel git it thegither for once, jist be way o' welcome to yon lassie."

"I see; very sociable idea."

"Weel, are ye comin' or no? For if not, Aw'll leave ye the key."

Now, a harmonium is a wretched substitute

for a piano ; yet, being fond of music, Wrayburn would willingly have idled away an hour playing over such fragments as he could recall to memory. But Miss Ford presented a counter-attraction. She was the first woman with any marked degree of refinement whom he had met for over five years, and the temptation to see more of her was too strong to resist.

“ I’ll come most certainly, with pleasure,” he said ; “ but I suppose I had better get a knife and fork, and a plate or two, first ? ”

“ Ay ; an’ any ither craukery ye haue too,” McFarlane bawled after him ; “ it ’ill all be handy.”

McFarlane’s house was the best and largest in Swanneck, but when the whole juvenile and adult population poured into it, they found it a tight fit. They filled the downstairs rooms, and overflowed into the kitchen, where the tea-tables were set out.

Every household had brought all its avail-

able plates, cups, cutlery, and seats, and had contributed something substantial towards the repast. The tables looked as if preparations had been made to feed five thousand in the wilderness, with as little miraculous aid as possible. Mary Ford was installed in the post of honour at Mrs. McFarlane's right hand. All the children being seated, the rest skirmished about and found seats as best they could.

"Now, when ye've done settlin' yerselves, Aw'll thank ye fur a moment's silence while we have grace," McFarlane said, standing up with his horny hands clasped before him.

A partial silence ensuing, he repeated a lengthy grace, while Fanshawe, sitting opposite, held an immense knife ready poised to begin operations.

"Amen," said he, with great fervour. "It's very nice to hear you elocute, Mr. McFarlane, but I believe in gettin' to victuals while they're warm. And if this pie before

me's of Jane's making, it'll not improve with lettin' grow cold. A good solid crust Jane makes, but a thought heavy."

Mrs. Fanshawe received her husband's rather doubtful compliment with perfect good humour. She was a buxom, pleasant-tempered woman, who had led a knock-about life in the States and Canada, and was roughened, but not hardened, by her surroundings, being naturally kind and good-hearted.

The meal was eaten with an amount of talk and laughter that gave it a festive air after all, in spite of McFarlane's efforts to preserve a sabbath-day quietude. Mrs. Bord's two dusky Indian handmaids, carrying her twin babies, hung about the door, looking on with stolid interest. "Johnnie," Fanshawe's Chinaman, ran about at every one's beck and call, his yellow face and twinkling black eyes turning up in every corner of the room.

"This is a novel experience for you."

Turning her head at the words, Mary found the owner of the baritone voice sitting on the end of a bench running at right angles with her chair, across the back of which his arm was laid.

"Yes, indeed," she replied; "I can scarcely realize that I am myself. It's all so different from home."

"Have you come straight from England? You have not lived in the colony before?"

"Oh no. I came out to San Francisco with friends from England. There I met the McIntyres, and came on with them to New Westminster; and there I found my first situation awaiting me."

"Well, I hope you will like the country. Did you not think the scenery remarkably fine as you came along?"

"Yes; no doubt it's very fine, very wild and savage. But really, what impressed me most was the immense distance we seemed

to be coming. I began to despair of ever reaching Swanneck, and more despairing about ever getting out of it once it was reached."

"You won't want to leave it once you get settled down."

"I don't know," said Mary, rather dejectedly. "I have the strongest desire to remain, and I know one must not expect too much; but still——" She broke off, and two large tears glittered in her eyes.

"I have no wish to leave it, and I have been here many years," said Wrayburn, cheerfully; "I like it better every year."

"I understood the settlement had only been some three years in existence," she said, looking up.

"That is so. But I was here a couple of years before any one else."

"What! all alone?"

"Yes."

"How could you?" she exclaimed.

“What could induce you to begin such a mode of life?”

“I had been knocking about various parts of America, and strayed into British Columbia without any fixed purpose. But I liked it so well that I camped down.”

“I don’t know how you could bear to live alone among those dreadful mountains.”

“It was lonely, of course; but I did not feel it at first. I brought over a couple of experienced men from Quentin; they built my house, and cleared a bit, and set me going. We lived in a tent, and it was very jolly. They stayed with me the better part of the summer. But when they had gone, and the novelty of the thing was worn off, I did feel most awfully lonely. And then I made absurd mistakes, as a ‘tenderfoot’ will. The men told me to lay in all my stores before the winter; and I laid in—as I thought—enough to feed an army. But either I miscalculated the length of the

winter or my own powers of consumption, for first one thing gave out, and then another, until I was living on weak tea and slap-jacks."

"Whatever are those?" Mary asked.

"A choice delicacy made of flour, grease, and water," Wrayburn answered laughingly. "Probably you'll make their acquaintance before long."

"I think I must be very hungry before I eat those; they don't sound nice," Mary said, shaking her head. "But what did you do? How long did your famine last?"

"Until I went into Quentin for fresh stores. It's fifteen miles to Quentin by road, and longer by the lake; but that is the way we bring nearly everything. So I skated over and borrowed a sledge there, put all I possibly could upon it, and hauled it home. They say it's easier to haul a sledge ten miles over ice than three over land. I don't know; but when I got home I thought I

had hauled myself inadvertently into the other world—‘clean over Jordan,’ as Morgan there would say.”

“You thought you had killed yourself?”

“Something like it. And then I did feel it was rather a miserable thing to die alone here. And I disliked the idea of dying in the house, yet had not strength to get off my cot.”

“What difference could it make, dying in the house or in the open air?” said Mary, regarding somewhat curiously this fanciful man.

“Well, you see,” he replied, “it would not be such an unheard-of thing to stumble upon the dead body of a man in wild regions like these. And the sort of men most likely to find such things would be almost sure to try some attempt at decent burial. But the very same men, if, in prowling about, they found a dead man in a house, would fly in nine cases out of ten, filled with superstitious

horror, feeling the place too eerie to remain. So I should never get buried."

"Horrid!" said Mary, with a little shiver, seeing in fancy the skeleton of the man before her lying in the forsaken house, muffled by the winter snows, parched by the summer suns. "Do not let us talk about such things. Tell me some more of your adventures."

"Really I have had no adventures ; I never sought them."

"Then, the sport here was not the great attraction to you?"

"No ; I'm not a great sportsman," he said slowly. "I have shot from necessity—for food, and do still, of course. But the mere killing of creatures for the sake of killing was never any great sport to me. They may as well live, if there's no reason why they should die."

"Really, after five years' residence in these wilds, I should have thought you would

have any number of encounters with grizzly bears and other fierce animals to relate."

"You must go to the threepenny thrillers for such encounters ; they don't occur here," he said, smiling. "I have a magnificent bear-skin at home which I use as a rug, but it was given to me by some Indians who favoured me with their company for a few days uninvited, and made me a present of it when they were going."

"Well, Indians ; have you had no Indian adventures ?"

"No ; I generally give them a wide berth when I come across them. Their ways are not 'ways of pleasantness,' I assure you. Once, when I got lost among the mountains in the passes above Auburn, I fell in with a wretched lot of scarecrows, and was glad to accept their hospitality for the nonce, and their squaws were very kind to me. But my record is still blank with regard to Indian adventures too."



CHAPTER III.

IT is not what people say, but their manner of saying it, which disposes us favourably or unfavourably towards them ; and there was in Wrayburn's manner much that Mary found acceptable.

“Is it not strange,” she said to the McFarlanes, “that a man like Mr. Wrayburn can pass his life in such an out-of-the-way place?”

“No doot he has his aun good reasons to be content wi' it,” Mrs. McFarlane replied, with a certain significance.

“Of course,” Mary went on innocently ; “many gentlemen have a taste for farming,

but are afraid to try experiments where land is dear. It is free here, is it not ? ”

“ Not sae free as ye might think,” Mrs. McFarlane said, with a touch of tartness in her tone. “ There aren’t a many things in the world that are jest altogether free, Miss Mary. An’ yon mon didna get his free. He paid good money for’t : and he’s not boun’ to live on’t, and improve it, as we are.”

“ And what does he live on, then ? ”

“ On his money,” McFarlane chimed in. “ Twice a year he tak’s a wee jaunt a’ the way to Victoria for’t. Aw’ve often tauld him he staunds a gude risk o’ bein’ robbed some day. But it doesna seem to trouble him. He’s a vaira detairmined chap, Aw’ll say that fur him ; and there’d be some hard strokes fur them that attacked him.”

“ It’s a strange life,” said Mary, musingly. “ But no doubt people who wish to see the world don’t mind discomforts.”

“ Aw’ve seen a gude bit o’ th’ warld mesel’,

an' Aw've met a gude few who war seein' th' warld till they war gettin' reg'larly fit fur doin' nothin' else," McFarlane said, slowly nodding his head. "But Aw've never met waun that settled himsel' at th' back o' th' mountains, be way o' seein' th' warld."

"You think he has some hidden reason for being here?" Mary said, with a troubled expression.

"There's a' sorts o' people in th' colonies, Miss Mary," said Mrs. McFarlane, "an' ye canna tell who's who. There's vera respectable [people, an' college-bred gentlemen; an' there's men fleein' fram justice that's embezzled money, or stolen, or done murder, or want to keep awa' from a wife they don't like, or have maur wives than one; and they're just vera glaud to be a long way off, and quiet."

"Mr. Wrayburn scarcely looks like a man flying from justice," Mary said, slightly smiling.

“Ye caunna tell,” observed McFarlane ; “men dunot carry the stamp o’ their sins on their forehead like th’ braund o’ Cain. Yon man interferes wi’ no waun, and we’re boun’ to respec’ them that mind their aun business. But he doesna farm. There’s not a bit cleared but jest what th’ bit hoose staunds on. He lives irreg’lar, keepin’ no fixed hours ; and he’ll disappear fur weeks togither. Mind, Awm not sayin’ he’s not a prauper sort o’ man ; but Aw *do* say Aw’d advise ye to form no great acquaintance wi’ him. He’s weel-favoured an’ weel-mannered, Aw knaw ; but Aw’d not have ye encourage him.”

“I shall always meet civility with civility,” Mary said composedly. “But if you think I am one given to forming sudden friendships, or indulging in small flirtations, you are mistaken. My life has been sorrowful, and kindness—coming from whom it may—will always be grateful to me.”

She could not say kindness was wanting in Swanneck. Yet she felt very unhappy, lonely, anxious, dispirited, and homesick. There were many small surface worries, too, that tried her patience. The prying impertinent curiosity of the under-bred women who were her sole companions; the rough conversation of the men; the ignorant vulgarity of the children;—these all vexed and depressed her. The absence of the comforts and conveniences to which she had been accustomed, and the constant moving about—boarding a week at a time with each married couple in rotation—were incessant worries in themselves.

“I don’t know where anything is belonging to me,” she remarked to Mrs. Fanshawe. “My things are all in chaos. I’ve no sooner unpacked them in one house than I have to cram them all in again and depart.”

“It’s because you’ve a deal too much luggage, as all new chums have,” replied

her hostess. "I could get all I have into that portmanteau; and you've a great box as well."

"I thought I had very little," sighed Mary. "They told me to bring all I could in the way of clothing, as there was nothing to be had here."

"Bless your heart, they'll tell you all sorts of stuff if you'll listen to 'em. When I lived down at 'Frisco I'd heaps of good clothes, silks and stuffs, and jew'lry too. But when we were coming here, says I to myself, 'What manner o' use'll all this stuff be to me in the backwoods?' So I just turned all I could into money again—that's always useful—and the rest I gave away. And if I'm short of a gown I can always get a bit of plain stuff over at Quentin."

"Oh, certainly it does not matter much what one wears here," said Mary.

"Why, what a poor, chicken-hearted, doleful little creature you are!" exclaimed

the cheerful woman. "It don't much matter what old married women, up to their eyes in work, wear. But a young girl like you—it's quite different. If I was you, with a good figure, and all that nice hair, I'd set my cap at some of the young chaps here, and not stick so close to work, but have a bit of fun. There's George Penrhyn, a fine strapping fellow, I'm sure. He's better looking than either Duffy or Brennan; but they're the better bargain. They're right well off, and a steady pair too; and Duffy's a gay, pleasant lad. He'd be only too glad to take you out for a drive or a row. You mustn't be too particular. If they were only labouring men once, they all own their bit of land now, and have a tidy bit of money saved too, I'll bet."

Mary did not resent Mrs. Fanshawe's match-making proposals. They were so good-naturedly made, that she could only smile.

“Matrimony is the last thought in my head at present,” she said, “and I’ve no intention of setting my cap at any one.”

“Oh, I know you think they’re not good enough, or suitable. But if you wait until you find a gentleman you’ll wait here for ever—unless you take the ‘poor devil,’ as they call him ; and I’d be afraid he wouldn’t be a safe venture.”

Mary maintained a discreet silence, suspecting the remark was made merely as a feeler. In her solitary walks she occasionally encountered Wrayburn, and held trivial conversation with him in spite of McFarlane’s warning. She had come to the conclusion that the prejudice against him arose simply from unsatisfied ignorant curiosity. Wrayburn had not explained who and what he was, the why and wherefore of his solitary life, or the *raison d’être* of the odd inscription over his door.

He was friendly, obliging, and pleasant with

the settlers ; would do a good turn for any one, would lend anything, money included. But he never asked any favours in return ; never went in and out of their homes, as they did with each other ; and never joined their services. Consequently they believed he was keeping up the traditions of a superior social status, and they choose to feel affronted.

Mary had been about a month in Swan-neck, when she received her first letter from her grandfather, her only relative, and one dearly loved by her. It had been forwarded from New Westminster, and brought on from the post-office at the store in Quentin by one of the men. She seized it with avidity, and hurried away to the woods where she could be safe from interruptions. She read it over twice : first with eager, devouring eyes, then with rising tears. At last, dropping the paper, she threw herself face downward on the mossy earth, and

burst into a flood of passionate tears. All the long-suppressed trouble of former years, joined to the fresher troubles of recent date, culminated and found a bitter relief in this storm, which was all the more violent because of her habitual self-restraint. Her very soul was sick within her with the sense of loneliness and bereavement. Old wounds began to bleed afresh, while the weight of vain longing for home oppressed her.

The tragic tempests of sad humanity pass as do the fiercer tempests of elemental strife, leaving a clearer atmosphere behind. Gradually she grew calm again, and, sitting up, wiped away her tears. Then, resting her flushed cheek on her hand, she looked out over the lake with weary, lack-lustre eyes.

The old-fashioned sunny streets of a prosaic little English town rose up before her like a vision. The small house, and quaint old garden, where the apple-trees in this May month would be a mass of rosy

blossom ; the sitting-room, with its dingy family portraits and treasured heirlooms, all were there ; and the old man would sit alone now. Tears gushed forth again with each tender recollection, though she brushed them away as they rose. A commonplace picture ! so very commonplace, and yet so dear that the beauties of nature around could not compensate for its loss.

Yet a glorious landscape stretched before her. The afternoon sun flooded all the hills, and penetrated even to the most sombre valleys, spangling the dark foliage there with a thousand glints of gold.

A cascade, fed by melting snow in the hidden recesses of the mountains, leaped down a precipice, snow-white and foaming ; sparkling in sunlight with prismatic lustre ; darkling in the gloom of some cavernous niche in the great chasm ; throwing aloft clouds of spray as it burst asunder over projecting rocks ; but ever continuing its

brilliant flight downward to the dark ravine, where it was lost to sight.

Very different from this gay tumult was the serene beauty of the peaceful lake, reflecting the hills, the woods, and the blue heavens in its clear depths as in a mirror. The wild fowl, gliding slowly with indolent grace, carried their images beside them painted upon the pellucid water. The faint breeze stirred an almost imperceptible murmuring sigh in the forest. Not a bird uttered a note ; not a cloud shadowed the earth. Here surely, if anywhere, was the kingdom and abode of "sweet peace." Yet this homesick heart longed for that shabby room ; for the shade of those gnarled old apple-trees.

Presently a rushing, rippling sound disturbed the silence, and a canoe darted past. It was Wrayburn's canoe ; he was returning from an afternoon constitutional.

Although he passed close in-shore, he did

not appear to notice Mary. She looked after him with idle interest, watching him dip his light paddle from side to side as the slight craft shot out of sight, leaving a sparkling wake behind on the ruffled surface of the crystal lake.

She was mistaken in supposing Wrayburn had not seen her. Not only had he observed her, but he observed also the distress of her whole aspect, and forbore in consequence to recognize her. But as he went homeward, filled with pity for her, he wondered whether it would look like kindness or impertinence to go to her and try to relieve her sorrows.

He decided in favour of the former. So, when he had moored his canoe, he turned into the woods and went straight to her.

Impatient of interruption, the sound of an approaching footstep irritated her, though the frown on her brow relaxed when she saw Wrayburn.

“What are you doing here on my grounds, looking so melancholy this splendid day?” he said, as he sat down near her.

A shamefaced blush rose to Mary's cheek. “I felt so lonely and miserable,” she said; “I did not know it was your ground. But I hope you won't put up ‘Trespassers will be prosecuted;’ for it's a great comfort to have a quiet corner where one can come and have a good cry. I have so little privacy.”

“Is that so? Then we must call this point ‘Mary's Refuge.’ But I hope you will come here to indulge pleasanter feelings by-and-by. How do you get on with the people here?”

“Not well; though it is most ungrateful to find fault, for they are all so kind; but I *cannot* like them.”

“They are rough and uncultivated, but not bad sort of people for all that; good-hearted, and honest, and most industrious. You must try to look a little below the

uncouth surface, and find out their good qualities, for they have many."

"I know it," faltered Mary; "but you really must not lecture me to-day on my shortcomings. I am too weak to bear it. I have had my first letter from home to-day, and it has made me feel——"

"*I* lecture you? Heaven forbid!" Wrayburn exclaimed. "You little know how much I sympathize with you. And I know your feeling so well. I have suffered so much that at times, long ago, I would have thrown the whole thing over—given it up and gone straight home, only I was too proud."

"I'm afraid pride would not be a strong-enough motive to detain me if I had nothing but my own will to keep me here," said Mary.

"One does not expect or desire a woman to exhibit any uncommon strength of will. She is privileged to be weak and undecided. But when a man has turned his back upon

the world, and said as plainly as he can, 'I don't need your company,' and then comes hurrying back to prove that he does need it, and cannot live without it, he looks rather small."

"But we are made social creatures, Mr. Wrayburn. It is against our nature to pretend we can get on without each other."

Wrayburn made no immediate answer, but looked straight before him with a thoughtful expression, as if trying to recall the memory of feelings from which time had erased all bitterness.

"Is it that?" he said at length, "or that we hold to the tradition that we can't do without each other? There are times when something seems an absolute necessity to our life. But at a later time we are forced to surrender it, and have to learn it was not necessary."

"Then your argument is that nothing is necessary?"

“Not exactly; but that we can get used to anything in time.”

“I wish I could believe it,” Mary said sadly.

“Men grow used to wealth and position they were not born to. They get used, also, to misfortune, loss of rank, of money, love, friends, favours, health; why should they not get used to isolation?”

“Because it is unnatural. And really I do not think it is such a desirable result even when attained. I hope you won’t think me impertinent, but I cannot help fancying your own life would be a more useful one if less isolated.”

“There are so many ways of deciding what is a useful life,” replied Wrayburn, carelessly. “I fail to see, myself, why activity necessarily implies usefulness. I may say with Emerson, ‘In good earnest I am willing to spare this most unnecessary deal of doing.’ If I dived into political life,

and followed the turns and twists of diplomacy; or if I pushed to the front at the Bar; or if I elbowed my way among the doctors, I should be considered a useful man. Yet I have no special revelation on the guidance of nations, and should only swell the crowd of chicaning old women who make our laws. Nor should I feel any more useful talking myself black in the face to prove a man was not guilty, when I knew in my soul he was; or in trying to persuade a man I had the right diagnosis of his case when I was all in a fog about it."

"Surely, though, you are pointing to all the unscrupulous men you can think of," Mary said, with an amused expression.

"No, I am not," he said, with good-humoured perversity. "The world is not made up of genius, but of mediocrity. Mediocre men are those who scrape through as best they can, and steer clear of as many mistakes as possible. The professions are

filled with men of all degrees of mediocrity, who make decent incomes, and are so far justified. But as I should do no better than they, and have as much money as satisfies my ambition, I may just as well be here as anywhere else."

"It seems so sad, though; such a negative sort of creed."

"I never made it into a creed. I simply followed the bent of my own inclination."

"When you were so lonely that only pride prevented you from returning to society?"

"Ah, well, you see, there were cross-currents troubling me at that time. I have pulled farther ahead since then, and got beyond their influence. And even then, when I was most discontented, I knew that if I only waited long enough I should grow content."

"Or you persuaded yourself you were grown content?"

Wrayburn was breaking a bit of twig into pieces and tossing these upon the lake. He

watched the last fragment float away, and then looked up.

“ No,” he said firmly ; “ I believed then, it is true, that ‘ Nature never did betray the heart that loves her.’ I *know* now that it is true. You don’t know how many consolations there are in nature until you have no other consolation to fall back upon. In what you call ‘ society ’ one never has enough money, or a high-enough position. And if these are all right, then Lesbia is unkind ; or, if she smiles, it is because you are an ‘ eligible,’ and can make good settlements. And there is always a thorn in the pillow, or a crumpled rose-leaf somewhere, and more or less fret and fume. But ‘ the everlasting hills ’ and free heavens never vexed the soul of any man.”

Mary was silent, wondering within herself what special calamity it was which had made this man retire into the wilderness, as in old days men retired into monasteries.

“Yes,” she said reflectively, “it may be true that, if we only look for it, we shall find great rest and interest, and even a certain companionship, in nature. But, after all, it is human love we seem to need and long for more than anything else all our lives long.”

“Because it is one of the imperishable things—the love, but not the companionship. That is perishable and transitory, like the money-getting, and learning, and pushing, and striving; so there is no use making a great moan for its loss.”

“But the very hills you praise so highly, are they not perishable and decaying all the time?”

“Truly. But they were here before us, and will be here after us; and I like to think that, even in the ruins of a world, whatever is worth preserving will be preserved. You know that verse in the Apocalypse, which speaks of the nations bringing their glory and honour into the city. I’ve always

taken it quite literally, believing that whatever worth there is in things will go into the next order, and bear a fruit there that failed of development here, or passed unperceived."

Mary looked at him rather doubtfully. "They told me you were a free-thinker, Mr. Wrayburn," she said gently.

"Did they? Oh, I dare say."

"Are you a believer in revelation, then?"

"It depends upon what sort of a God they've got to reveal," he answered, rather irreverently. "If it's Fanshawe's, or Morgan's, or McFarlane's, then decidedly not."

Mary looked puzzled, and glanced uneasily into his clear, straightforward eyes.

"A man will not speak ill of his best friend, will he, Miss Ford?"

"No. Rather he will speak well of him."

"And I will speak nothing but good of this place, where I learned alone what I never learned in the midst of men—to understand what is meant by revelation, and to

see how miserably men limit and pervert it by their own warped minds and narrow lives."

After that, Mary was undecided as to whether he was a deeply religious man in the orthodox sense, or only a propounder of some new nineteenth-century heresy.





CHAPTER IV.

“**C**OME and have a sail on the lake ; it will refresh you,” Wrayburn said decisively, rising, and offering his hand to Mary. “Stay here, and I’ll bring the boat round in five minutes.”

He was gone before she had either consented or refused, and she stood under the trees awaiting him, yet unwilling to accompany him.

“How wrong I am to encourage his friendship, simply because he is an agreeable companion !” she said to herself with vexation of spirit. Taking a rapid glance into

the life before her in Swanneck, it did not miss her observation that friendship with this man might very readily be the harbinger of a tenderer feeling. She blushed fiercely at the thought. But it was not the self-conscious blush of a young girl whose vanity flutters before the possibility of a lover. It was rather the swift witness against a woman who had already suffered some heart-sorrow, and was anxious in future to keep her heart under discipline.

While she stood self-questioning, the boat arrived. Wrayburn dug his boat-hook into the shelving bank and drew close in.

“Now give me your hand, and step right in—that’s it. This boat was not intended for ladies, you see—there are no cushions; but I’ve folded a coat, and you must make yourself as comfortable as you can.”

Taking up his oars he pushed off, and the boat glided smoothly through the water.

“Can you row at all?” he asked.

Mary answered by spreading out the palms of her small soft hands for inspection.

"Those hands have not handled many oars," he said, smiling; "and I suppose you won't try, for fear of spoiling them?"

"If you won't mind just regarding me as lumber, I think I shall enjoy it more than trying to row, and only succeeding in catching crabs," she said.

"Now you have a nearer view of the islands," said Wrayburn. "There are five altogether, these two, and three lower down the lake. I call this on your left Sestos, because the rocks are shaped into a kind of natural watch-tower. The other I call Calypso, for all sorts of enchantment goes on there."

"Enchantment?" queried Mary.

"Yes. On moonlight nights the fairies come out and dance here in the fairy rings. And sometimes they are joined by the daintiest little ladies imaginable. Their

dresses are ornamented with fringes of acorns and oak-leaves, and they have frosty cobwebs for lace and diamonds. There are high jinks when they and the rest of the queer little people get together."

"I suppose those are the dryads?"

"I suppose so. You see this oddly shaped rock like a stall in a cathedral? I have seen the most extraordinary creature sitting in it, and making the most melancholy sounds. His face is quite old and wrinkled and solemn, half wise, half wicked; and he hides his feet in the reeds, for they are hoofs."

"Is it his Satanic majesty, who is 'hoarse with singing of anthems' in his cathedral stall?"

"No; I think it is Pan piping to Syrinx. She must be somewhere here;" and he flashed his dripping oar, with a rapid skimming movement, over the heads of the water-flats, making them bend as a field of corn bends before the wind. A few strong

strokes, and the boat shot clear of the water-weeds. He rowed on steadily for a few minutes, then paused beneath a jutting lichen-covered crag.

“The rocks are so steep,” he said, in a considering tone. “To-morrow I must bring an axe, and see if I can’t cut some sort of steps. Then you will be able to land, and see the most charming bit of natural garden you ever saw.”

“Is it on the island?”

“Yes; in a glade, or dell, surrounded by trees. The grass is as smooth as a lawn, and covered just now with violets and wood-anemones. There is a little stream winding through it, rising from a natural spring in a grotto half hidden by fern and other green plants. And all around are trees in clumps, and little mounds and shrubberies, as if made for effect.”

“It sounds very pretty. And what goes on there, Mr. Wrayburn? Any more fairies?”

“No ; it is too florid for the fairies. They like places more quaint and wild. But I’ve seen Bacchantes dancing there. And I’ve seen ladies like Pampinea, Fiametta, and Lauretta, with their ‘comely bachelors’ attending them, Filostrato, Dinoneo, and the rest. There they promenade, entertaining each other with ‘all manner of new and fair delights,’ and make up picture-groups under the trees or beside the stream. Narcissus pines away for love of the face he watches in the clear fountain-pool. Sometimes, too, I’ve caught a flutter of crisp white wings, and have seen Psyche and Cupid chase each other into the dim woods. Oh, it’s a place where you may sit and dream away the length of a summer day and never tire !”

“You have evidently built your soul ‘a lordly pleasure-house,’ where you entertain a great variety of visitors,” said Mary, smiling.

“Well, the thing that tells most against American scenery is its newness—rawness.

There's not a scrap of association or a poetical memory about it. I suppose we want a crust of time to form, and the illustrious dead who have filled Europe with all sorts of associations. Yet in perfect beauty this place would compare very favourably even with Switzerland. And you can fit what memories you choose to different spots, or people it with your own fancies."

"But that is not the same thing as the real. We must have the real Greece for the gods and goddesses. They surely don't take kindly to American soil."

"You must sacrifice something, of course. If you have not the real Greece here, neither have you a rascally lot of dirty, rapacious Greeks, nor crowds of Cook's tourists, nor naval picnics, nor 'Varsity men cracking stale jokes and singing Music Hall songs among the ruins of the Parthenon."

Mary laughed maliciously. "It makes you quite shudder, doesn't it?" she said.

“ Well, could anything be much worse ? ”

“ What happy man had the honour and glory of giving the name of Swanneck to the settlement ? ”

“ No one acquainted with Heine’s poem of ‘ Edith the Swanneck,’ or haunted by an Academy nightmare of the finding of Harold’s body,” replied Wrayburn. “ The Quentin people are responsible for it ; they also have a fine taste for ‘ association.’ I was known at first as the new chum who had settled just where the lake curves like a swan’s neck ; then, as that was rather roundabout, as the fellow at the swan’s neck place ; finally, as ‘ the Swan-neck man.’ The name arose from a desire for brevity.”

“ Does that waterfall flow into the lake ? ”

“ No ; the gorge opens out into a wide valley between the hills, and the fall floods all the low-lying land beyond. It has occasioned a good deal of loss and trouble to the man who owns that land. He has

made a sort of dam across part of it. Yet in summer, when he would often be glad of the water, it's all dried up, and as hard as a flint around."

"How beautiful it is here!" said Mary, with a little sigh of repose.

There was a sense of breadth and freedom out on the water productive of rest and tranquillity rather than exhilaration, and unconsciously her ruffled nerves were soothed. The sun did not seem to set, but simply to fade out of the sky. The rosy flush upon the hills changed to a dusky purple. The blue sky became clearer, paler, then rapidly darkened. A silvery crescent moon rose from behind the mountains, one solitary brilliant star near her.

"I think we had better get home," said Wrayburn. "Do you feel cold?"

"Rather," Mary said, shivering a little. "How soon it grows cold after sunset!"

"The nights are always cold at this eleva-

tion. Even in the hottest summers we often have night frosts. Have you enjoyed your little trip ?”

“ Very much ; I am greatly obliged to you for taking me.”

“ Nay, I should feel grateful to you for coming. Remember young ladies are as rare here as humming-birds. I hope this is only the first of a series of pleasure trips.”

“ But, according to your theory, I ought not to depend upon any human agency, but go straight to the heart of nature, and find out her goodness for myself.”

“ Ah ! now I see I have been entirely successful,” said Wrayburn, cheerily.

“ In what way ? ”

“ In making old Time turn on more hopefully. You are less doleful now than when I found you in the woods a couple of hours ago.”

“ That is true ; but the very admission shakes your theory more and more.”

"Never mind the theories, so long as we can make the best of things as we find them. Life is always more or less of a compromise. Do they make you pretty comfortable at home?"

"Oh yes. I am staying with the Bords at present. They are very kind to me."

Wrayburn drew his level brows together. "'I do not like thee, Dr. Fell,'" he said; "I mean Mrs. Bord. A slatternly, uncomfortable woman, I should think."

"I like her better than Mrs. Penrhyn, who is always grumbling and groaning. I should not speak so harshly, for she has much to try her. Her husband is talking of going back to the mines, because he could make more money. But she says he is only tired of the monotony here, and is willing to leave her all the work, while he has all the money to spend. He drinks a great deal, and she gets enraged with him. Only last night she came down to the store and scolded

Enoch before all the men, and then abused Eugene for selling whiskey to him."

"Don't you worry yourself about other people and their troubles," said Wrayburn. "The Penrhyns will make up their little differences amicably enough when they have had their quarrel out. You will 'make the galled jade wince' if you load yourself with other people's cares in addition to your own."

"Why do you think I have troubles?" Mary asked quickly.

"Your expression tells me so. Every face carries its own tale. Your life, I can see, has not been very satisfactory, any more than my own."





CHAPTER V.

THOUGH Mary professed to have so greatly enjoyed her boating-experiment, she could not be induced to renew it.

Wrayburn asked her many times to accompany him, but she invariably declined the invitation.

“*Why* won’t you come?” he asked at length, piqued and disappointed by her persistent refusal.

As usual, she had a hundred and one good reasons why she could not go just then.

“Well, I shall not ask you again,” he said pettishly.

Mary was rather amused by his petulance,

but it did not shake her resolve to go boating no more. Then, as he could not have her society in that way, he tried in another. When school was over for the day, Mary had got into the habit of remaining behind after the children were gone, and resting herself with a little musical performance all to herself in the quiet room. She did not greatly love the droning harmonium, yet she could find much solace in it, and by its means many a time exorcised the dark spirit of discontent, and sent it howling into waste places.

But after a while this innocent recreation was denied to her, or she chose to deny it to herself.

When Wrayburn began to make his appearance occasionally, dropping in as if casually to the little concert, not all at once, but by degrees, Mary discontinued her afternoon practice and went straight home.

If she went walking in the woods, then

some of the juveniles were sure to accompany her ; she was never alone.

Then he found means of partly ensnaring her with books. This was a bait that, in the utter dearth of literature in Swanneck, Mary could not find it in her heart to resist.

After browsing on the "Life of Dr. Chalmers" at the McFarlanes', and on the "Children of the Abbey" or the "Amulet" at the Fanshawes', it was a luxury to return to the companionship of her favourite authors. So she accepted the loan of his books.

"Aw wad think a bit o' whawlsome exercise wad be better fur ye, Miss Mary, than so much readin'," McFarlane said to her one day.

"The weather is too warm for walking," Mary replied.

"Aw'd like better to see sewin' or knittin' in a woman's hand sometimes, instead o' her face bein' always buried behint a buke," McFarlane went on. "Do ye're stockin's

never need mendin', or ye're skirts no' need tape an' buttons, or sech like, lassie?"

"They do certainly," Mary replied, smiling, "but I generally do such little things in my own room, Mr. McFarlane."

"Hoot toots! There's naw need to be so vaira perticular," he said. "There's no waun wad think less o' a lass fur bein' usefully employed."

"But I am usefully employed all day," Mary rejoined, "and my leisure is for recreation."

"Aw'd no' say a word against gude bukes read in moderation. But Aw'm boun' to set ma face against everlastin' readin' o' novels. A pack o' trash like yon's no fit recreation;" and he pointed to the volume of "Pendennis" in her hand.

"Some of the happiest hours I have ever known were spent in reading such books as this with the best and dearest man in the world—my own grandfather."

"That's *vaira* deeferent," said McFarlane, quickly changing his ground. "Ye were in ye're awn home, an' the bukes were ye're grandfather's. Ye had no need o' lendin' and borryin'."

"Then it's not the books, but the mode of getting them, that you object to?" said Mary.

"I object *to* the bukes, an' *to* the gettin'. Can ye no' see he's jest tryin' to entrap ye wi' his bukes?"

"I don't understand you, Mr. McFarlane."

"Aw think ye *do* understan' me *vaira* weel, lassie. He's had a lang fast fraum flirtation, but ye shouldna be th' one to gar him mak' up fur lost time."

Mary made no reply, because she knew the futility of speech with such an opponent. She did not lack spirit to resent this attack, but her habit of self-control aided her judgment in leaving a wide margin for the man's ignorance. She was too proud to protest,

and too wise to argue with one whose especial talent it was that "even when vanquished he could argue still." Bitter as was her vexation, she resolved to remove all ground for complaint by declining any more books, though the loss would be a positive deprivation.

That same afternoon Wrayburn was at home and alone as usual. He was sitting at the table in the centre of the room, preparing some bird-skins for stuffing. The door stood open, and his dog lay across the threshold. The westering sun shone in at the window, filling the room with warm amber light. Though the château consisted of only two rooms, it was by no means an uncomfortable home. The room in which he sat was large; the ceiling and walls made of the smooth American red pine, the floor of larch; all varnished, bright, and clean-looking.

A row of shelves ran along the wall oppo-

site the window, the lower being filled with books, the upper shelf serving as a handy place for keeping everything not in immediate use. A stove stood on a sort of hearth-stone, raised a few inches above the level of the floor. Another shelf served as mantel-piece, and on it were a cigar-box, a tobacco-jar, and a pipe-rack. On the wall above were hung a couple of fowling-pieces, some harpoons, an axe or two, a stuffed snake-skin, and lower down some photographs in frames made of pine-cones. Several owls and other birds, showing the evident handiwork of an amateur taxidermist, adorned the other walls, in company with water-colour and pen-and-ink sketches, wood-carving, figures moulded in clay, dried plants, and similar odds and ends. Everything indicated the half-wild, half-cultivated, and wholly self-centred existence of the man. Regarded as an "interior," it was interesting and picturesque ; regarded as a home, it was

comfortable upon the whole, in spite of bare wooden furniture, and a floor uncarpeted save by a large bear-skin in front of the stove—the skin the Indians had given.

As Wrayburn worked he smoked, consuming his tobacco in the slow meditative way which may betoken concentrated thought, or may only be the smoker's *dolce far niente*. He was thinking, indeed, of Miss Ford, when the dog sprang up; a shadow darkened the sunny doorway, and Mary herself stood there.

She had come quite openly and fearlessly to his house, with a kind of meek defiance, to return his books to him under the eyes of all Swanneck.

Wrayburn laid down his pipe, pushed back his chair, and, rising, went to the door to greet her.

“Talk of an angel, and you’ll see its wings. I was just thinking of you, Miss Ford,” he said. “Come in and sit down.

I'll not shake hands with you, for I use arsenic with these skins. You want some more books, I suppose. But why trouble about these? I would have brought you some more, and taken these back then."

Mary laid the books upon the table. She did not accept the invitation to sit down, but her manner was as perfectly unembarrassed as ever.

"I have come to thank you for the books, Mr. Wrayburn, and to return these. But I will not have any more, thanks."

"No more? Why not?" said Wrayburn.

"I find they only give offence," she answered.

"How on earth can books give offence, and to whom?" he asked in surprise.

Then Mary repeated part of what McFarlane had said to her, leaving out the other part for obvious reasons.

"You are not going to mind that absurd old humbug," he said.

"Oh yes. He has it in his power to make my position here very uncomfortable, and I desire, above all things, to live peaceably with my neighbours."

"Peaceably—yes. But peace purchased with one's freedom is not peace, but tame submission to paltry tyranny. You are far too yielding and patient."

"I should be. I have been well drilled," Mary said rather bitterly.

Wrayburn made no direct reply, but took up the offending books and returned them to the shelves.

"If you are going to let McFaclane have everything his own way, the place will soon be too beastly for you to live in," he complained.

"He has a wonderful influence over the others," she said.

"Over a parcel of fools, who don't know their right hand from their left," he answered curtly.

Life in the forest had developed the natural tendency there was in Wrayburn to show whatever he felt, and he was now in a thoroughly bad humour at finding himself everywhere defeated.

"Foolish or not," said Mary, "I am depending upon them, and do not wish to make them my enemies. You must have had very little to put up with in your lifetime, Mr. Wrayburn," she added, smiling.

"I thought I had put up with a good deal," he replied, "but I would take very good care I did not put up with ridiculous nonsense like this."

He came back to where she was standing by the table, and fixed his bright, dark grey eyes upon her.

"Listen to me, Miss Ford," he said imperatively; "there is no such thing as public opinion here, unless you create it. Conventional standards and precedents are no use here, where every one has to do what

is most convenient—or in any place at the back of the world. Why, are you going to be the only one to bind yourself down with rules which don't hold good for any one else?"

"I only wish to do what I consider is my duty," Mary answered indifferently.

"First of all, you won't go boating with me; then you won't sing with me; and now you won't have my books, for fear of Mrs. Grundy—in Swanneck!"

If it was not altogether Mrs. Grundy, if she had some little private scruples of her own, she was not going to tell him that. So she was silent.

"If you would only be more friendly," he said earnestly, "I could have made your life here much pleasanter in many ways; or, at least, I think so."

"I don't doubt it," she said coldly; "I am very much obliged for your kind intentions. But I must go now, Mr. Wrayburn;" and she held out her hand.

“ No, don’t go just yet,” he said ; “ I want to show you something.”

As he spoke he lifted a large and rather battered-looking portfolio on to the table, and began to tumble about its contents. There were sketches and drawings of all sorts of places, people, and animals. As Mary glanced at some of them, she said—

“ After all, Mr. Wrayburn, you have more conventional relics about you than any one else here.”

“ Oh, when I made up my mind to a life of solitude and silence, I did not intend to turn Trappist altogether. This old thing has been a constant companion. I sent for my books from home, too ; and I never go down to Victoria without bringing back as much as I can carry of all sorts of rubbish, to pass the time in the long winter nights. Here it is.”

With that he held up a small water-colour drawing of Mary herself. She flushed

crimson when she saw her own face, but with vexation rather than pleasure.

“Would you like to send it to your grandfather?” he said, putting it into her hand.

“Oh yes!” she answered quickly, the anger fading from her mind and countenance.

“He would be so pleased.”

“Then do so. But that idea was not in my mind when I did it,” he added candidly, lest she should credit him with more than his due.

“Do you often go down to Victoria?” she asked.

“No. Twice a year or so.”

“When will you be going again?”

“I don’t know. Under ordinary circumstances I should have gone in May; but now I shall probably not go until the fall.”

The thought occurred to Mary that it was her presence which had disturbed the current

of his ordinary circumstances, but she made no comment.

"I can get nothing here, yet I should so much like to send a few things to the dear old man," she said; "I thought perhaps you would not mind getting some things for me next time you go—curiosities, you know. He has such a fancy for them. My father was a naval officer, and used to bring home all sorts of foreign things for him."

"Your father is dead?" said Wrayburn.

"Yes, years ago. Father and mother are both dead, and I never had a sister or brother," she said simply.

Wrayburn sighed. "Perhaps you are just as well without them," he said. "This is my brother."

Mary went forward to examine the photograph he pointed to upon the wall—that of a handsome man in military uniform.

"He has a strong resemblance to you," she said. "Is he a soldier?"

“Only Militia,” Wrayburn replied. “Here is his wife.”

This was a photograph of a stately girl in evening dress ; dark-haired, dark-eyed, proud, resolute, yet smiling and gracious.

“She is beautiful!” Mary said, with genuine admiration ; “only she looks just a little *too* lofty.”

“These were taken some years ago,” said Wrayburn ; “they are both older now—perhaps wiser too.”

“Did they lack wisdom?” Mary asked, looking up with interest. “They don’t look foolish. The lady especially looks as if she had a firm faith in herself.”

“Others had once a firm faith in her too, but it was rather misplaced,” he answered quietly. “She was the most ambitious woman I ever knew. Still, I should feel grateful to her, for she pushed me on as I should never have pushed myself. I owe it to her that I took my degrees, and if I’m

no better for having them, that's my own fault, and not hers. She used to say she loved excellence in everything."

The slightest suspicion of a sneer crossed his frank face as he spoke. It was gone in a moment, and he turned to yet another photograph.

"This is where they live," he said.

The picture showed a large house with Italian façade, standing on elevated ground. There was a terraced garden below, with balustrades, fountains, statuary, and parterres. Underneath was pencilled, "Sanclerc Park, Cornwall."

"Oh, what a fine place!" Mary exclaimed. "Are you a Cornishman, then?"

"Yes. I was born in that house," he said, "or at least in the old house; for it has been entirely rebuilt. It was a rambling old shabby comfortable place; not that stucco affair. It has been her doing, not poor Ted's. He is the most modest man in the

world, without any ambition to be what is called 'a county magnate.' It has been part of her scheme of excellence."

"Is it a high crime and misdemeanour for a wife to be ambitious for her husband?"

"Not if it were for her husband. There are plenty of women, dear good souls, who believe their commonplace husbands are fitted to rule empires; and, failing those, are always plotting and planning for their advancement. These only use 'the pride of life' as a means to an end; but my sister-in-law uses the husband as a means to her own ends."

It was evident to Mary that there was some "little rift" within the family lute, and she tried to drop a subject that was clearly associated with secret bitterness.

"You have quite an art gallery here," she said lightly. "It is pleasant to have so many reminiscences of home."

"I did not keep them as reminiscences,"

he said—"they were sent to me; and as it seemed a pity so much polite generosity should be wasted, I made these frames and hung them up."

"And they look so nice," Mary replied, rather feebly, for she noticed that his manner had gradually increased in warmth. Presently the flame shot forth.





CHAPTER VI.

WRAYBURN began to put the drawings back into the portfolio, in a restless kind of manner ; then suddenly desisted and returned.

“ Six years ago, Miss Ford, that lady was to have been *my* wife,” he said abruptly.

Mary looked at him in surprise.

“ Were you engaged to her ? ” she asked.

“ Yes ; for three years. I had then what I have now—three hundred a year. But I had then what I have not now—the promise of a large fortune. With it I should have been a much wealthier man than my elder brother. Unfortunately, it depended upon

the will of a very whimsical old lady—my grand-aunt — and upon my own good behaviour. But apparently I did not behave satisfactorily, for I didn't get the money ; *ergo* I didn't get the wife either."

"Oh, what is the use of lamenting?" sighed Mary. "What happiness can be expected with people who trim their sails to every wind, and are always thinking of the loaves and fishes? Why mar your own life for the sake of such people? Be thankful you are free."

"I may be thankful for a good many things besides my freedom," he answered gravely, "but a man can't rub out a bit of his life as you rub a sum off a slate; and that bit colours all the rest."

"Of course it does," she said sadly; "but it has left you without a yoke upon your neck. You can't efface the old, but you can reform the new; and think what a blessing that is! To be able to let the dead past

bury its dead ; not to be tied to a corpse which must be dragged about wherever you go. Oh, it is so much to be thankful for."

He looked as if he did not quite understand her.

"You mean that, had I got the money and the wife, I should still have proved in the end that it was not for myself I was married. Well, I suppose that would be akin to dragging about a corpse, for I don't think I could go on loving some one who did not return my love. I have no fancy for a marble Venus."

Mary was silent, and after a moment he continued—

"If any other man than my own brother had supplanted me, I could have borne it better ; but that cut me to the heart. The man I loved as if we were still children—honoured, believed in his integrity as I believed in Heaven, that he should prove base was too much. I could have got over the pain of being jilted, but I could not get

over his treachery. If it had even been treachery of the hard and brazen sort, but it was not. He was self-accusatory, full of regrets, full of shame, halting between two opinions, persuading himself he was the victim of fate, and apologetic to the last degree. To do her justice, I think, money apart, if she had a preference it was for him."

"Let us hope they are happy," said Mary.

"Yes, I believe they are. She has secured a good part of all she set her heart upon, and he is devoted to her. Still, acting as he has done, and considering the high-minded man he was, I cannot think he is altogether happy and contented. I don't choose to believe it, anyhow. Not because I want revenge, but because the least justice he can do to his own character is to feel remorse."

"You seem to feel your brother's disloyalty more than the lady's," said Mary.

"I do. To the last hour of my life I shall

feel it. I regarded him as a prince among men; my mind was an open book to him. He could not plead ignorance. Then to stab me in the dark, with mean, beggarly contrition, was enough to destroy my faith, not only in him, but in all men. If he was faithless, who could be trusted?"

"What would you have wished him to do?" she asked, in a constrained voice.

"Do!" he echoed. "I would have had him hold his tongue, however much he loved her. If he could not remain near her without tampering with her, then let him go away. Why should I be the one banished?"

"You have banished yourself, perhaps, in your obstinate anger."

"I do well to be angry. For three years I studied her pleasure in everything. I turned and twisted myself to meet her requirements. I tortured my brain with study. I went into all sorts of society that I did not care a farthing about, just because

she wished it. I was to be a senior wrangler—I need not tell you I never *was*—I was to go into Parliament, I was to be a cabinet minister. Did she not love excellence in everything? and, that I might finally excel, my nose was kept day and night to the grindstone. Then the excellence all melts down into this: I *minus* the hundred thousands am of no value at all, and all the excellence is found in Sanclerc and Ted. There he is! Colonel of Militia, J.P., and M.F.H.; a man who looks upon hunting as the most confounded bore. But anything to be popular and prominent!”

“You are bitter, Mr. Wrayburn.”

“I am, and I'm not,” he answered carelessly. “I never complained, never quarrelled with them. They were considerably relieved that I took it so quietly. In reality I was stunned. When one is flung suddenly from the infinite azure to the infinite abyss, what possible form of complaint can a man make

that bears any proportion to his loss? Since the days of Job downward, words, mere words, have always been powerless to express the depths of grief and loss. I was wounded in everything—faith, love, pride, expectation, and every plan I had cherished. Any complaint I could make would only have been the *hysterica passio*, and be no relief. Everything I had built upon was broken up. All I wanted was to get away into some quiet place and be alone. I seem bitter to you, because to speak of this now is like throwing a stone into a muddy pool; all the mud is stirred up from the bottom. But until to-day I never have spoken. I scarcely know now why I have told you.”

Mary sighed. “I suppose,” she said, “there is a sort of magnetism between people, even strangers. We instinctively find out the people likely to be in sympathy with us. The majority are so taken up with the practical affairs of life, that to them the loss

of the fortune would seem your greatest grievance, and all the rest mere unsubstantial sentiment."

"Oh, the loss of the money only troubled me so far as it was productive of all the other trouble. She had a perfect right to leave her money to whom she pleased; and, knowing her as I did, I had never greatly relied upon it. I was only twenty-six then. The world was my oyster, to be opened without any aid to my own talents. I rather despised the money, in fact."

"Ah, yes; but we have to learn that a great many mean, low, paltry things can assert themselves so aggressively, that we can't afford to despise and ignore them," Mary said, again sighing.

Whatever reply Wrayburn was about to make was interrupted by a small footstep, and a tap at the door.

"Who is there? What is it?" he called out.

"Please, sir, supper's waitin', an' is Miss Mary no' comin', father says," a shrill little voice replied.

"Yes, Sandy, I am coming. Tell them I'm coming this moment," said Mary; and the small steps pattered off again.

"It is little Sandy McFarlane," she said. "I must go, Mr. Wrayburn."

"When will you come again?" he said, forgetting the arsenic, and holding her hand in his own. "I hardly ever see you now."

"The houses are all open to you. Why don't you come to see me?" she answered good humouredly. "Mr. Duffy and Mr. Brennan and young George Penrhyn are continually dropping in to see me in the most artless fashion. And I'm afraid the poor fellows must be quite denuding their own homes, for I'm gradually acquiring the most wonderful collection of things you ever saw, that they bring me."

"The most wonderful thing I could bring

you would be myself, and you might not appreciate that," Wrayburn said, in a tone that might imply much or little, according as it was taken.

Mary chose to make very little of it.

"Oh, I should appreciate the honour greatly," she said, smiling, "because it is a notorious fact that you are not on visiting terms with the settlers, and I could not help feeling flattered by any exception in my favour. But good evening, Mr. Wrayburn ; and thanks very much for the books."

He stood at the door looking after her as she went away. She never moved hurriedly, but with an even step and smooth, dignified grace. If she was not beautiful, she was at least harmonious, and that was even better. The lines of her figure, the low tones of her voice, her tranquil self-possession, all produced the agreeable effect of harmony, which has a fascination of its own quite distinct from the fascination of beauty.

That her attractiveness had a powerful influence over him was now an admitted fact with Wrayburn. That she appealed to something in his heart, fitted to some groove in his nature, could no longer be doubted.

He went indoors and re-lit his pipe, but did not resume his work. Leaning his arm upon the mantelshelf, he gazed at the picture of his lost love with a long, unswerving gaze. Perhaps he did not even see it. When we are completely engrossed we will gaze upon a stick or a pebble with the same absorption.

It had never entered into his calculations that he might love a second time; not because it was impossible, but simply that he had never thought about it one way or the other. Not being a man to perplex himself with hard questions or painful self-analyses, he did not probe his wounds. They were accepted as a permanent disfigurement, a permanent enfeeblement, perhaps; but if they scarred over and healed, so much the

better. It was not his part to revel in that morbid keeping alive of sorrow for sorrow's sake. The natural honesty, common sense, and cheerfulness of his disposition were all safeguards against that.

He was thoughtful, but not melancholy ; not desirous of retaining "pain as his guest." It was not to nurse his grief or brood over his wrongs that he had buried himself in the wilderness. His feeling had been akin to that of a man who has been severely jostled and mauled in a crowd, and is glad to find some unfrequented place in which to recover his breath and his disordered faculties.

Wrayburn was painfully conscious that he could never regain the ground he had lost ; never form anything that could be called a career ; and gradually he had ceased to desire it. Solitude had made him take wider and more general views of life than would have been likely had he formed part of the working world. Home-sickness, dis-

content, ambition had vanished one after the other, while a wholly different class of feelings replaced them. He could not now be called even a disappointed man. The outside things of life had fallen away from him, but he was a gainer by the loss, for he had a stronger hold upon its realities.

While very catholic in his sympathies, he was very limited in his affections; he loved few, but loved those well and without reserve.

That Mary Ford was a woman whom he could love with this unreserved affection he fully realized now. But he was not likely to fall into any fantasy of love. Not because he was timorous, though a man who has already suffered cruel defeat may be excused if he hesitates before a fresh encounter. But at thirty-two, though still impulsive, he was no longer vain.

Mary had given him no reason for supposing that she regarded him with any

special favour, and he was blinded by no self-deception. It did not follow of necessity, because he was the only gentleman in Swanneck, that he would be found an acceptable lover on account of his gentle blood.

His pipe was smoked out. He raised himself up from his lounging attitude with the air of a man who has made up his mind upon some question, and come to a definite conclusion.

The things still lying in disorder upon the table he quickly swept into one of the numerous tin boxes, which were as useful to him as his haversack is to the soldier; then, taking his hat and whistling to his dog, he set off for a walk in the mountains.

It might be midnight or dawn when he returned. As McFarlane had truly said, he "lived irreg'lar, keepin' no fixed hours." Often, if he found some new place or thing that interested him, he would take his knap-

sack, rug, and gun, and camp out there for a week or two. The hands of his watch by no means guided his movements. He ate when he was hungry or when it was convenient, not at stated times; and it was rarely he took more than two meals in the twenty-four hours. In this erratic way he had seen a good deal of nature, still and animated; had observed and studied the ways of men, animals, and plants until his head was something like an unarranged note-book. Nothing came amiss to him; there was interest and good of some sort to be extracted out of all.

This perfect freedom from restraint, real or artificial, was the great charm of his life in the backwoods. Such entire freedom and independence cannot fail to produce in even the most unselfish character a certain want of pliancy, a difficulty in adapting one's self to the ways of others. Wrayburn saw plainly, yet with regret, that if he married

he must in all probability give up the life he found so pleasant.

No woman he was likely to marry—certainly not Mary Ford—would contentedly remain in Swanneck. If he was satisfied to let the world pass him by, others would not be so complaisant. He saw that for him marriage would inevitably mean the re-modelling of his whole life. Still, though he might regret, he did not waver.

As the ground became more hilly, he went on ascending with a rapid swinging step, turning his face to meet the fresh mountain wind, which blew cold and keen after the sultry day. Again and again, like the refrain of some song, Mary's words returned to him—"You can't efface the old, but you can reform the new; and that is so much to be thankful for." The words caused a picture to grow gradually before his eyes, and the picture was pleasant to look upon.



CHAPTER VII.

MARY went serenely home, and found the McFarlanes had finished their evening meal.

Her plate was left for her, and she sat down and took up her knife and fork.

As Mrs. McFarlane placed the coffee-pot before her, she bent forward and whispered hurriedly—

“Alexander’s in a vera ill humour th’ nicht. If he says onythin’ to ye, ye’ll tak’ no notice, wull ye?”

Mary raised her eyes with a little astonishment. McFarlane, who was sitting opposite

mending a whip-handle, heard them whispering, and "glowered." Presently he spoke.

"Was it to defy me ye went to yon mon's house, Miss Mary?"

A sense of wearied disgust began to steal over Mary, but she answered pleasantly—

"No. I went to return his books, and to tell him that I would not have any more."

"Awm glaud to hear ye have even that much sense," he replied, but not in any mollified tone. "Did it tak' ye waun hour and twenty minutes to tell him that? Aw was in th' bauck lot, an' saw ye pass on yere way to him; an' before ye caum bauck was waun hour an' a haulf save ten minutes."

"Well, Mr. McFarlane," she asked, smiling, and without any air of offence, "and suppose it was *two* hours and a half, what then?"

"Eh, ma lass, yere light airs wullna go down wi' me," he answered angrily. "Awm a plain mon, used to plain ways, an' Aw

caunna do wi' ony double-shuffle. 'Twas Aw brocht ye here, and Aw dinna waunt to be discredited by ye. Gin ye hauce no respec' fur yeresel', ithers maun care for ye. Is this mon prepared to marry ye ? ”

Mary's face grew red and pale alternately. She half rose ; then, thinking better of it, sat down again. Mrs. McFarlane, who sat with her back towards her husband, telegraphed her warnings to Mary by means of vigorous winks and nods.

“ Is it expected that every man who speaks to me shall be prepared to marry me ? ” Mary asked, in a cold, cutting tone.

“ No, no, now. Don't ye git on like thaut,” McFarlane said sarcastically. “ It's not o' just every mon we're speakin', but o' waun parteecular mon.”

“ I'm aware of that,” she answered. “ Is Mr. Wrayburn, then, expected to be ready to marry me because he chooses to speak to me ? ”

“Aw doot he’s ready to do onythin’ o’ the sort,” retorted McFarlane. “It wasn’t to gar ye lose yere gude name wi’ a lazy, soft-spoken loon that Aw brocht ye here, lassie. Yere frien’s confided ye to ma care; an’ Aw durs’na abuse their trust. There’s a saulemn matural respaunsibility laid upon me, Miss Mary, an’ as a Christ’en man Aw maunna let it slide.”

“Will you be good enough to tell me what it is you are talking about?” she asked abruptly.

“Aboot yeresel’. There’ll haue to be some prauper understandin’ aboot this question betwixt us, Miss Mary. Fraum th’ fairst Aw advised ye to haue nothin’ to do wi’ him, and Aw didna speak hastily. Aw’d had opportunities of obsairvin’ him and his manner o’ life, an’ it’s not what ony sensible body can approve of. A useless, vagabond life, led be a mon who’s got maur money than he knaws hoo to spen’ wisely.”

"But what has that got to do with me, Mr. McFarlane?" Mary persisted.

"So far ye'll haue neither advice nor interfairence," he went on, as if she had not spoken, "an' Aw must say ye've shawn a far too independent speerit fur a young leddy airnin' her awn bread. Instead o' bein' thankful, ye're offended wi' them that'd gar ye walk wi' becomin' discretion, an' keep ye away fraum a fella that's just takin' advantage o' yere simplicity."

"Perhaps I'm not quite so simple as you suppose," Mary said frigidly.

"Endeed, lassie, that's a true word," he answered gruffly. "Maybe ye're not. There's oftentimes the mawst deceit behint th' fairest face."

Mary was well aware that McFarlane was one of those obtuse, self-opinionated people who exaggerate the importance of everything they take in hand, and try to glorify themselves by asserting their authority on

every possible occasion. In general she regarded his domineering ways as provoking but harmless. At present she saw he was likely to make mischief, unless he was put down.

"I had no need to come to Swanneck," she said quietly, but firmly, "to be taught how a woman should conduct herself; nor is it likely that I shall ever intrust the care of my reputation to others. My own conscience is quite guiltless of having done any harm, and with that I am satisfied. But, of course, I do not expect always to please those whose standards of right and wrong may differ from my own."

"Aw caunna be fashed list'nin' to yere fine talk," he cried impatiently. "Ye'll no' say it was right an' prauper fur ye to go down to yon mon's house an' spen' th' aufternoon wi' him?"

"Certainly; perfectly right, if I had a reason for doing so," Mary answered reso-

lutely. "Since the reading of novels seemed displeasing to you, I felt that in such a small matter it might be better for me to sacrifice my own inclination. But when a person has been kind enough to take trouble in many ways to give me pleasure, I am not so ill mannered or so ill conditioned as to ignore that kindness. I could have sent Agnes or Sandy down with the books; but I chose to go myself, that I might thank Mr. Wrayburn, and explain my reasons for not borrowing any more. As for the rest, I have yet to learn," she added, with a touch of scorn, "that it is unbecoming to enter into conversation with a gentleman, even in his own house; to look at his pictures, or to feel an interest in one who is so agreeable and unaffected."

McFarlane kept slowly nodding his head while she was speaking, his eyes fixed steadily upon her.

"No doot! no doot!" he said, "ye find

him viara agreeable an' accommodatin' ; no doot at all. But tell me jest this, lassie—did ye caum here to entertain Mr. Wrayburn, or did ye caum here to teach the children ? ”

“ Alexander,” Mrs. McFarlane interposed hastily ; but her husband waved his hand to enjoin silence.

“ Hoots, Jessie woman, haud yere tongue ! ” he said loftily ; “ ye’ve nothin’ to do wi’ it.”

“ If I do not give satisfaction to the rest of my employers, no difficulty need be raised ; I will resign,” said Mary, composedly.

“ There’s no talk o’ resignin’,” McFarlane interrupted ; but she went on unmindful of the interruption.

“ You have rather over-estimated your authority. You have interfered quite unnecessarily in trifles which do not in any way affect you. You have gone out of your way to insult me. Until you apologize and choose to treat me with the respect that I

think is due to me, just as much as to other people, I will not see you, or enter your house."

With that she rose and quietly left the room, without the least flurry or excitement.

"I doot but ye've foun' one as detairmined as yeresel'," Mrs. McFarlane remarked, as if released from silence by Mary's departure.

Now, McFarlane, having engaged Mary as teacher, and being the one deputed to pay her salary, felt that the position entitled him to assume the office of censor, in addition to that of quæstor. That a dependent should think and act for herself was insubordination. That she should esteem his advice so little as to set it aside altogether was gall and wormwood to a man whose *ipse dixit* was always respected. As he had been the means of supplying Swanneck with education, he considered the teacher should be under his finger and thumb in everything. As Mary had not

acknowledged this unwritten law, his anger was kindled against her. He disliked any one who failed to recognize his infallibility. He was beginning to dislike Mary for this reason ; he already disliked Wrayburn. Somewhere down in the depths of his slowly revolving brain there was a vague suspicion that some daring souls regarded him as ridiculous rather than infallible. Wrayburn had invariably met his moral aphorisms and didactic discourses with laughter and persiflage. He would never argue, and therefore the argumentative McFarlane had never been able to gain an advantage over him. All this he set down as the insolence and defiance of a man easy in his own position, who did not think it worth while to trouble himself with inferiors. Though religious, McFarlane was malicious, and would gladly do an ill turn to his enemies—but piously, “for their good.” Also he was inquisitive, and liked to know the why and wherefore of things. These

characteristics made it anything but agreeable for those who incurred his displeasure.

When Mary left his presence, she put on her hat and went straight down to the store, intending to pay for a week's board and lodging there, rather than foist herself before the right time on any of McFarlane's neighbours.

When she told Eugene of her disagreement, that worthy man danced back a few paces on his heels, and, throwing back his jolly head, burst into a peal of laughter.

"La belle Marie has quarrelled wis ze excellent Mack! Ze little white pigeon has had ze scene wis ze big mastiff. 'Monsieur, you are tiresome, you fatigue me; confine your attentions to ze yard. I will not sit in zis cage, moi! I will sit on ze roof, if it so please me, voila!' Marthe, Marthe," he went on, raising his voice, "here is ze poor Mees Mary, who has had ze deeference wis zat dam Mack. Make her ze cup of tea."

“No, thank you, Mr. Bord,” said Mary ;
“I have had supper.”

“Sopper ? zat is nossing,” replied Eugene.
“When mam’selle quarrels wis her dear friend, it is ze cup of tea ; when monsieur, mon mari, will not buy ze new bonnet, it is ze cup of tea ; when mam’selle my dotair will make ze bad marriage, it is still ze cup of tea—always ze cup of tea. Come, Marthe, zat cup of tea, vite, vite, vite !”

“Well, Mr. Bord,” said Mary, laughingly,
“whenever I quarrel with a Scotchman, I will always take refuge with a Frenchman.”

“Always supposing ze Frens’man is so happy as zat he is zere,” answered the gallant Eugene.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning McFarlane said to his wife, "That's a vaira foolish lass to tak' th' bit between her teeth."

"I dunno what ye wanted vexin' her," replied Mrs. McFarlane, who was sorry Mary had gone, and was not altogether disposed to side with her husband.

"Jessie, Aw haup Aw'll never shrink fraum rebukin' evil," he said sternly.

"I don't rightly see what evil she's done, or what for ye're findin' fau't wi' her," his wife answered.

"She's here," said he, "not aunly to teach, but to set a gude example to th' young wauns

grawin' up aroun'. Is it a gude example fur her to be traipsing th' woods wi' yon fella, talkin' wi' him, readin' his corruptin' bukes? What sense o' releegion or duty has he? just always follyin' his awn pleasures. Then he invaygles her to his house; fur of coorse it's all a pretence aboot th' bukes. An' yet ye can say, 'What evil is there in't?' No, no; Aw'll not haue Master Wrayburn amusin' himsel' at her expense, an' makin' a fule o' th' puir lass wi'oot hauvin' a word to say on it. An' he's boun' to listen to ma protest."

Full of his own importance, McFarlane "stepped down" to Wrayburn's house during the morning.

As he drew near he halted for a few moments among the trees, as if to take stock of his man, and consider how he could strike him most surely.

Wrayburn was sitting on a bench outside his house, engaged in the homely but necessary occupation of washing his clothes.

A faded old fez covered his crisp dark hair ; his shirt-sleeves were rolled up ; his braces unbraced ; his long sinewy arms plunged to the elbow in a bucket of foaming soapsuds, which stood between his feet. As he wrung out the garments he threw them on the bench beside him. When all were done, he would knot them in a long string and tow them in the lake before spreading them on the stones to dry in the hot sun.

While he frothed and rubbed, he was singing the "Wanderer" in a sort of unconscious undertone. As the low tones of his pleasant voice fell upon McFarlane's ear, the latter felt he hated him. To this man who had been reared in penury, who had scrimped and saved, toiling late and early, to attain even the very modest position he had gained, there was something irritating in the sight of the man before him.

Wrayburn might be carelessly clad in old

clothes, and engaged in menial work, yet he had through it all the air of one to whom such things are merely incidental from choice, not from necessity. With youth, strength, knowledge, and a steady income behind, well might he look easy and self-assured. McFarlane, remembering how painfully he had managed to acquire his own scanty education, and how laboriously he had gathered his small savings, looked upon Wrayburn as a bloated aristocrat in spite of the many evidences of "roughing it" written on his muscular figure, tanned complexion, and worn features.

"Ay," he said to himself, "how true it is, 'they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men'—no verily." Then he advanced and accosted his neighbour.

Wrayburn sat up, stretched out his long legs, set the shabby fez well back on his head, and leaned his shoulders against the wall of the house.

“Good morning, Mr. McFarlane,” he said.
“Fine weather for laundry work.”

“Yes, sir, thank the Lorr, the weather’s all a mon can desire. Aw’ve no fau’t to find wi’ th’ weather.”

“Is there anything else you have got to find fault with?” Wrayburn asked carelessly, but with a somewhat humorous smile.

McFarlane coughed, and passed his hand slowly several times across his mouth. “Well, yes, Mr. Wrayburn,” he said very deliberately, “there *is* somethin’; in fact, it’s wi’ yersel’ Aw haue to find fau’t.”

“Dear me, I’m sorry to hear that. Is it an indictable offence I’ve committed?” the other asked jestingly. “Go ahead, anyhow, and don’t beat about the bush.”

“Aw’m not satisfied aboot Miss Mary. Aw don’t think it was a right thing fur ye to detain her in yere hoose yesterday fur near two mortal hours.”

“Don’t you? Oh, well, I don’t suppose

I shall be so lucky as to get a repetition of the visit; so you can make your mind easy."

"Mr. Wrayburn, it's easy to turn things off; but Aw tell ye Aw'm not satisfied. Aw've a duty to discharge. 'Twas Aw brocht th' lassie here. She's alaun an' unprotected, an' it's ma dooty to protect her fraum all hairm o' waun sort or anither. Now, what Aw waunt to know is this—are ye simply fulin' wi' her to fill up yere idle time? or hauve ye serious an' honourable intentions o' marriage wi' her? Aw speak fur her as aw'd speak fur a daughter o' ma awn in th' like case. Aw caunna bear to see triflin', an' folks fallin' into all manner o' folly through sheer idleness an' infairmity o' purpose."

McFarlane spoke with a slow and solemn emphasis, and Wrayburn appeared to listen patiently enough.

"I must beg to be excused from answering

such very personal questions, Mr. McFarlane. They seem to me quite unnecessary," he said gravely.

"Not so unnecessary as ye may think," McFarlane replied, with a stolid air. "Miss Mary's a young woman, an' it's to be supposed she's not so *vaira* unlike other young women. Her mind'll run on lovers an' marryin's th' same as them. She's a *vaira* superior young woman ; well edicated, an' a leddy. An' o' coorse ye call yersel' a gentleman, an' can make up to her wi' maur assurance than th' rest o' th' plain folks here. But that doesna give ye onny right more than anither to take a liberty wi' her."

"Fiddlesticks ! You're making a fool of yourself, for you don't know what you're talking about," said Wrayburn, rising impatiently.

"Easy there ! Not so much a fule as yeresel' perhaps," McFarlane said, with more warmth. "If ye haue no honest intentions

o' marriage wi' her, then there's no right-minded pairson as caun approve o' yere meetin's an' visitin's. They're naught but injury to th' lass; less'nin' her aun self-respect, an' distairbin' her mind."

"If I know anything of Miss Ford," said Wrayburn, "her self-respect is too firmly rooted to be easily shaken; and I have no intention of disturbing her mind."

"Then ye've no views o' marriage?"

"I shall not answer you one way or the other. I don't understand what you mean by trying to run me up in a corner this way; or admit that you have any right to find out what my views may be."

"Mr. Wrayburn, that answer condemns ye."

"So be it. If it pleases you to condemn me, do so by all means."

"It'd better become ye to be maur manly and straightforward."

"If it is manly and straightforward to

stand up and allow one's self to be catechized like a child, I prefer to remain unmanly. But I don't see what good we shall get by staying here, if we are beginning to throw mud at each other."

"Aw'll thraw no mud. All Aw want's fair dealin'. Ye must remember, Mr. Wrayburn, that, even supposin' yere intentions to be honest, no waun here knaws onythin' aboot ye, an' couldna tak' it upon theirsels to say ye were a fit match fur th' lassie."

This speech appeared to excite Wrayburn's sense of humour, for, vexed as he was, he could not help laughing.

"If I were thinking of marriage," said he, "don't you think I might be able to convince the lady of my *bona fides* without taking all Swanneck into our confidence?"

"Then, as Aw said before, ye're not thinkin' o' marriage?"

"I did not say I was, or was not."

"Shifty, shifty!" said McFarlane in strong

disgust. "Anyhow, ye'd best be quick an' make up yere mind waun way or th' ither, fur she's talkin' o' resignin'."

"Of resigning? She said nothing about that yesterday!" Wrayburn exclaimed in surprise.

"Ye may take it fur graunted ye don't jest knaw all that happens," replied the other, with much self-satisfaction. "She didna like bein' foun' fau't wi' fur gaun to yere hoose. So she's up an' away in anger. An' it's jest to make things straight Aw cam' here. If so be ye're intendin' marriage, no waun caun object to yere coortin' her. But if it's jest philanderin' ye are, then she's as well away; fur she'll do no gude here, an' aunly be a bad example to ithers."

Wrayburn was naturally hot-tempered, and, though he controlled his present feelings by a considerable effort, his face flushed up, and his eyes glowed angrily.

"If you think you can make things

straight, as you call it, by coming here to question me," he said, "you are very much mistaken. I will not have any man's interference in what concerns myself only; so I advise you to mind your own business, and leave me to mind mine."

As he spoke he went into the house, and shut the door with a bang.

"A pretty muddle that infernal, mischief-making idiot has made for me!" he said, stamping his foot in rage.

He knew exactly how McFarlane had spoken to Mary. He had offended her modesty and roused her spirit, and had brought things to a most unpleasant crisis by his ill-timed self-assertion.

"What am I to do now?" he said to himself. He and Mary having both quarrelled with McFarlane over the same subject, it was impossible to remain silent and take no notice. Yet what was he to say to Mary? how approach the subject without hurting

her or offending her afresh? The more he thought about it the more perplexed he felt. Just at the very time when he was most anxious to win her good opinion this inopportune "row" had occurred. Pride would probably make her shun him now, although she might not yield an inch to McFarlane.

There was nothing for it, he thought, but to make her an offer of marriage now, though he could not but feel it to be premature. There was not the slightest evidence that he possessed her affection. Mary had been too shy, or too determined, to permit any approach to wooing. By making his proposal now he ran the almost certain risk of refusal. As an honourable man, he saw no other course open to him. But that he should be directly forced into it by the maladroit McFarlane made him grind his teeth.

Once his mind was made up, Wrayburn did not let the grass grow under his feet.

Without any further delay, he made his toilet and went straight down to the school-house. The children were just coming out with a sudden burst of noisy merriment. Making his way through the little crowd of youngsters about the door, he went up the room to where Mary was standing putting away some things.

She looked even paler and more wearied than usual, but a faint smile lighted up her face as she shook hands with him.

"I do feel *so* tired," she said. "I suppose it is the hot weather. Mr. Bord says this has been a very fine summer. Do you know, I have been here nearly five months? And it seems such a short while since I came."

"Miss Ford," Wrayburn said, not regarding her small talk, "I have been awfully vexed this morning."

"Indeed! What has vexed you?"

"It appears McFarlane has been talking to you about me."

“Yes; and I did not like the way he spoke, so I left his house, and am staying with the Bords.”

She spoke readily, without any perceptible change of manner, and Wrayburn felt embarrassed.

“I hate to be the cause of inconvenience and annoyance to you,” he said.

“Oh, it is not your fault.”

“Whether it is or not, I want to put things on a right footing. I have come to ask if you will marry me, Miss Ford.”

He felt utterly disgusted with himself for plunging into the subject thus awkwardly; but his temper had been so upset that he could not put things gracefully, and made his proposal in this bungling fashion.

Poor Mary's colour began to fluctuate, and her self-possession deserted her.

“Oh, Mr. Wrayburn!” she murmured.

These feminine signs of yielding greatly encouraged him.

"I had not intended to speak so soon," he said; "I wanted to give you time to know me better. But if I don't speak now, when I have the chance, we may be parted through the misguided zeal of that stupid man."

There were tears in Mary's eyes as she raised them to his. "You are very good," she said—"very good, and kind, and honest."

It was not exactly the answer he expected, and a momentary disappointment followed.

"I don't see that kindness or honesty has anything to do with it," he answered, a little impatiently. "I love you sincerely, and wish to make you my wife. But I would rather have waited a little longer before saying so, because I'm afraid you may feel somewhat prejudiced against me—especially after what I told you yesterday."

He waited, but Mary did not speak.

"It may look fickle and inconsequent to tell you about that one day, and ask you to marry me the next," he went on. "But

remember it all happened years ago ; it is nothing more than a memory to me now. I am willing to wait any length of time if you will only tell me I may hope to win your love."

Still Mary was unable to reply. She stood half turned away from him, that she might hide her emotion, which increased every moment.

" Mary dear, can you not say one word to me ? " he said, taking her hand gently.

" I cannot ; I may not listen to you," she said, drawing the hand away.

" Is it because you think that but for McFarlane I should not have spoken ? " I assure you most solemnly my mind was fully made up before that. He had nothing to do with it beyond making me speak at a time I should not have chosen but for his interference. I would have preferred to wait longer, that is all."

" I believe you," she said.

“And you will believe, too, that the past has no influence over me now. All that is completely gone, and my heart beats as warmly for you as if I had never loved before. Do not doubt me, Mary. I never expected to love any woman again. You have brought a new hope into my life. You will fulfil that hope and make me happy, will you not ? ”

He was very much in earnest now, and bent over her eagerly.

“If I could I would make you happy ; but I cannot,” she said, in a choked voice.

“You will not have me ? ”

“Oh, I did not come here to have any one, or to think of love or marriage. I have my duty to do, and I must do it, whatever it may cost. My life is hard—hard and bitter enough ; do not make it harder, I implore you.”

“Then you do not love me. I thought as much ; I felt I had no chance.”

“I did not say that. I *do* love you—at least, I know I could love you, but I may not. I shall never marry. There is one straight path that I see plainly before me, and I shall not deviate from it. Do not question me. Those at home, who love me best, know why I follow that path. I have suffered a great deal; have borne much disgrace and misfortune, and been very unhappy. I may love you; I think it is very probable I shall not be able to prevent myself loving you; but I shall remain as I am.”

“Mary, you are utterly enigmatical.”

“Am I? It is not my fault. I might have been happy; others have spoiled my life, not I myself.”

“But think of what it is you are saying: you love me, and yet will not accept me. I did not dare to hope for such an admission. To have gained it, and then to be told I may not keep your love—that is hard, Mary.”

"It is hard—as hard for me as for you," she returned in a lamentable voice, and with quivering lips.

Wrayburn stood for some moments in silence. He had told himself that he did not expect much from this interview, but from the greatness of his dejection he knew now how much he had really hoped.

"It's all nonsense!" he exclaimed at length. "I won't hear anything more about this 'duty' and 'plain paths.' You have got hold of some morbid notions which you imagine are duties. If I am fortunate enough to have gained your love, I will not be deprived of it for the sake of some foolish idea."

"Oh no, they are not foolish ideas; they are realities," she said, hardly above her breath.

"There is plenty of time, and you can't be expected to change all your views in a day," he said, with re-awakened courage.

"I will say no more now, but I shall renew the subject when you have had leisure to think over things."

"If I thought for ever, Mr. Wrayburn, I could by no possibility change my mind," she said earnestly, as if anxious to convince him.

"We all think that, of course," he answered, smiling. "Your opinions are not as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians any more than your neighbour's. 'My faith is large in time,' and I'm willing to await its results."

Soon after he left her and went home again. He was not altogether dissatisfied with his interview, yet he did not feel happy.

He recognized that there was something behind herself influencing Mary in rejecting his offer. She might be embittered by some former love-affair which had terminated unfortunately. Not seldom in such cases women resolved never to marry. Five out of every six saw good

reasons later on for breaking their resolve, married, and "lived happy ever after." The sixth would be just such a woman as Mary; a deep heart under a still surface; a heart that would not break or waver, but live on in firm, solitary, steadfast loyalty to her own love, although the one on whom she bestowed it proved unworthy.

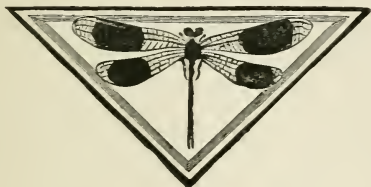
Or she might be influenced by some disgrace in her own family; something that should make her proudly determined to end that family with herself. She had spoken of disgrace and misfortune. Where did the blame fall? Not on her grandfather, whom she dearly loved; brother she had none; father and mother were long dead.

This was a question it was impossible for Wrayburn to unravel without assistance, and he had no great curiosity to unravel it. He knew it was considered *infra dig.* for an honourable man to ally himself with a family

on whom rested shame or stain. There had been a time in his own life when he would have sacrificed himself in any way rather than make some shady alliance. But that time was gone by. The opinion of the world troubled him no longer. If it suited him now to marry the daughter of Judas Iscariot, he felt he would do it, though every one was pointing the finger of scorn at him. Let the woman herself be all that a woman should be, and that sufficed. Her family's virtues could add no lustre to her own ; nor could she be shamed by the reflection of wrong-doing in which she had no participation. With Mary herself he was perfectly satisfied ; content, too, to believe that, whatever were her motives for refusing him, they were good and reasonable.

He was too considerate and gentlemanlike to worry her by pressing his suit with undue pertinacity and frequency ; moreover, he was not in such a transport of love that it needed

an outlet in continual importunities. But he had made her understand that he intended to offer himself again, and this knowledge made her use all diligence in avoiding him.





CHAPTER IX.

THE lingering summer vanished ; the autumn was vanishing too.

Mary was like a woman filled with some consuming sorrow. Blithe she had never been in Swanneck ; an undercurrent of melancholy ran through her brightest hours. Even her very moderate cheerfulness forsook her now. The tinge of carmine colour and the brightness of her eyes were the indications only of a mind fevered by worry and unrest. This new brilliance deceived the good Swanneck people, who said how much handsomer she was growing, and gave the Swanneck air credit for the improvement ;

but never noticed how thin she was growing also, and how dark were the circles under her shining eyes.

Her will battled ceaselessly within her. That she might shun solitude she found constant employment for herself. Solitude releases the brain from constraint, and thought runs riot. In the night, when she should have been sleeping, her brain was released and punished her. It was then the painful contrast between what *was* and what *might* have been presented itself in all its intensity. It was then she surveyed the wreck of her life beating upon the rocks. It was then she realized the breach that had been made in her self-reliance and fixity of purpose. The plan of life she had so fearlessly laid down for herself embraced only duty. Love was rigorously excluded. The discovery that she loved Wrayburn filled her with horrified dismay. The remembrance of her confession that she loved him made her

passionately brace every nerve to resist him.

“I cannot do it here, where I am always seeing him,” she said within herself. “I must go away from here.”

It was not quite so easy to go away. She was bound by the same conditions which hold other teachers to their contracts. If it came to Wrayburn’s knowledge that she was going, and on his account, as she knew very well he would find out, he would reverse their positions. He would go away that she might remain in peace. And that was not to be thought of. How could she see him driven far afield to find fresh pasture, when his present pasturage gave him such settled content? It greatly worried her to discover the possibility of getting away secretly, yet without discredit. The two seemed altogether incompatible. Some stigma would certainly attach itself to any such attempt.

While she was trying to solve this problem, Wrayburn unconsciously removed the more serious part of her worries by electing to pay his autumnal visit to Victoria just then.

“Mary, will you change your mind, and promise to marry me when I return?” Wrayburn asked her on the evening he set out upon his journey.

“No, Mr. Wrayburn ; I cannot change my mind,” she answered. “I wish, for your own sake as well as mine, that I could convince you my answer will always be the same. Why will you give me the pain of refusing you? You know it does give me pain.”

“It gives me pain too, Mary ; but I am willing to put up with it,” he said, “for I don’t think it will last always. I believe I shall be successful yet ; so I’m not discouraged.”

He seemed, indeed, in no way depressed or defeated by this second refusal, and set off in excellent spirits.

“Night or Blucher!” said Wellington at Waterloo. In much the same spirit of desperation Mary said to herself, “Now or never!” knowing that some active step must be taken ere Wrayburn returned.

But to move from the passive to the active required assistance, and McFarlane was the only one who could give that assistance. She had quarrelled with him, yet her only alternative was to eat humble pie, and go to him.

She began by reminding him of the terms of her engagement, offering to relinquish her salary for the sake of immediate release. But McFarlane’s understanding grasped any new idea so slowly, required so many reasons and explanations, that poor Mary began to fear she should see the returning figure of her lover before she had even made this dreadful Gael comprehend that there was no just cause or impediment to hinder her immediate exit from Swanneck. The

Gael could put two and two together as well as his neighbours, once he got a clue; and, however slowly he arrived at it, in the end he had his innings. By the light from within he was able to understand all mysteries.

“Ye’ll be fur gettin’ married to Mr. Wrayburn in Victoria, of coorse,” he said, with a slow all-comprehending smile, “An’ ye didna go togither. H’m! vaira prauper, vaira prauper indeed. But ye must min’ what ye’re doin’, lassie. Did ye never hear tell o’ buyin’ a pig in a poke?”

Mary stood aghast. She was almost ready to wish the earth would open and swallow either herself or McFarlane—preferably McFarlane. Already she seemed to hear a “knocking at the gate” to which that in *Macbeth* was child’s play. In her desperation, bent only on wrenching herself free, she told him all, though burning with chagrin at making public gossip of a private

matter. McFarlane felt all the secret elation of a simply-seeming diplomatist who has unwittingly stumbled upon the very secret it was intended he should never find out. Then this tacit confession that he alone had sufficient authority to guide the affairs of Swanneck ; how gently stimulating to his vanity ! Truly, the Lord be thanked, it was a good day for McFarlane.

As usual, he raised difficulties at the outset for the sake of magnifying his own importance. But in the end one formidable barricade after another was swept away, and the road smoothed for Mary's speedy departure.

If she did not leave Swanneck by night, she yet went out of it in haste and spoiled the Egyptians before she went.

She had been scolded and browbeaten by McFarlane ; yet, now that she was leaving, he formed and headed a committee for presenting her with a testimonial. She had

not "sorted" well with the Swanneckers, but they suddenly awakened to a keen interest in her desires, and showed a ready sympathy.

At the testimonial meeting in the little school-house, they were almost melted to tears by their own description of the loss they were about to sustain. Speaker vied with speaker in searching for terms sufficiently eulogistic to show their appreciation of Mary's character. They became so much "enthused" with their subject, and showed such a frank enjoyment of their own oratory, that the actual presentation fell rather flat after so florid a preliminary.

The ceremony consisted in paying Mary the full quarter's salary she had been willing to forfeit, for they scorned to abide by the strict letter of their agreement. Then—as watches, clocks, and salvers were not forthcoming in Swanneck—each homesteader added of his substance what seemed to him

fit. The gift was accompanied by a large paper, on which was drawn up, in spotless caligraphy, but obscure English, the "argument" of the occasion, and this was signed by all the donors.

Several of the women and all the men accompanied her to Quentin. There the former bade good-bye to her with actual tears and many embraces. They had done what they could, these struggling, hard-working, good-hearted people, and Mary's heart was filled with grateful warmth towards them.

"Ah, Miss Mary," said Mrs. Fanshawe, "you never liked Swanneck, but I do believe you're sorry to leave it."

To their surprise, the tears rushed up into Mary's eyes and overflowed. There was one spot in Swanneck named "Mary's Refuge" to which a certain pleasant memory would ever cling. There was another spot, known as "*Le château d'un pauvre diable*," to which

her heart kept passionately looking back, while all the time she was going farther and farther from it.

"I never thought I should feel so sorry to leave it," she said through her sobs ; and her sorrow made the good people think only more highly of her, since parting from them had moved her even to tears.

At considerable expense and inconvenience to himself, McFarlane accompanied her all the way to New Westminster, with that scrupulous sense of duty which often distinguishes Scotchmen in a marked degree. At New Westminster Mary halted for a brief rest at the McIntyres' house before continuing her journey to San Francisco, also that she might write to the Grays and prepare them for her arrival.

Alfred Gray was an electrical engineer. He had come out to an appointment in California some years before ; had "run" back to England to marry and bring his

wife out ; and had taken several "runs" since, combining pleasure with business.

In returning from one of these trips the Grays were accompanied by Mary, who came with them on a sort of ladylike prospecting experiment of her own. They were her only friends in the New World, so to them she naturally returned now that her first experiment had failed.

Mrs. Gray's greeting to Mary was affectionate, but condoling. She purred over her friend with as much sympathy and commiseration as if Mary had just returned from some more than usually disastrous polar expedition.

"Now, Mary," she said, when they sat down together to enjoy that cup of tea which Eugene Bord had satirized, "I know you have not told me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Was it because the place was too strait for you that you left Swanneck, or had you some other reason?"

"It was too strait, certainly," said Mary.

"Well, you are looking wretched; a thin little jaded wisp of a creature. Whatever have you been doing with yourself? I am sure you have had an awful time, and am longing to hear all about it."

"No; the place is awful, but the people were very kind to me."

"What was it, then?"

"I had an offer of marriage, and that made me unhappy."

"Oh dear, dear! But really did it matter so much? Who was the man, Mary?"

"His name is Wrayburn. He owns land and lives there."

"Poor man! so he drove you out," laughed Mrs. Gray.

"Fanny, I don't see that it is a laughing matter; it was a very serious matter for me."

"Oh, unpleasant, and undesirable, and all that, but just one of those things that cannot

be helped. I wouldn't elevate it into a serious matter, Mary, if I were you."

Mary made no reply. Mrs. Gray sat silent for a few moments, her bright eyes fixed intelligently on her friend's face. At last she said—

"Mary, I don't think even yet you have told me the whole truth."

"No, Fanny, I have not," Mary answered composedly.

"It is not possible you care for him?"

"Yes, Fanny, it is possible. I do care."

"But, child, think of what——"

"No," Mary interrupted, "I don't want to think. It was because I could do nothing else but think that I came away from the place. I was too utterly miserable to remain there longer. And, Fanny, when we have talked over it just this once, I must ask you to be good enough to say no more about it to me."

"Certainly not. But, Mary — oh, how

unfortunately things do turn out! You had enough to trouble you without this. I feel so sorry for you. And my life is so shamefully smooth and happy that I cannot bear to think how you must feel the contrast."

There were tears in the good little woman's eyes; but Mary smiled back at her affectionately.

"Surely," she said gently, "you don't think I'm such a pitiful creature as to grudge you your share of happiness because I am not equally fortunate? One would think that when I got myself to the extreme ends of the earth, I should be tolerably safe. But in flying from one evil I've encountered a worse."

"Oh no, Mary, not worse."

"Yes, worse," Mary repeated, with stern sadness.

"And we all thought you would be so secure there," sighed Mrs. Gray.

"You would think so more than ever, if

you could see the place. If you can imagine something wilder and more solitary than any of the wildest places you have ever seen, you may get some idea of Swanneck. There is nothing but forest and mountain, mountain and forest. They say the valleys are fertile. They would need to be to compensate people for living in a place that is almost inaccessible. There is little or nothing to pay for the land, but the settlement is so remote that I don't think it can prosper."

"And the people, what were they like?"

"Very suitable for the place—Welsh and Cornish miners, agricultural labourers, and lumbermen."

"Worse and worse! But how could you care for any of those people?"

"I did not. Mr. Wrayburn is not one of them. He has his own reasons for living there, just as I had mine."

"It is all very unfortunate," Mrs. Gray

said pathetically, and fell into deep thought. The two women seemed to awake from their reverie simultaneously, and looked sorrowfully in each other's eyes.

"Fanny," said Mary, "I asked more than once in my letters, but you never answered the question ; did Captain Loxdale ever come here ?"

"No, Mary, he never came here."

"And you have seen nothing of him ?"

"I have not seen him," Mrs. Gray replied steadily, but she coloured as she spoke.

"Grandfather wrote that he had sailed for America. He professed to know where I had gone ; but perhaps it was only a pretence."





CHAPTER X.

WHEN Wrayburn returned to Swanneck and found that his bird was flown, he was surprised and rather indignant with Mary. She was gone ; every one could tell him that, though they could tell him nothing else ; or, if they could, he was too proud to ask, for he made no inquiries. But he had no intention of letting her escape him thus quietly. He knew that she had gone to San Francisco, and he had heard her speak of the Grays, but beyond their name he had no knowledge of them.

“I’ll beat up every Gray in ’Frisco till I find her,” he said to himself.

So his birds and his dog were taken back again to their lodgings at the store, and without a word to any one he set out once more upon the road he had so lately traversed. This second journey was less pleasant than the first had been. It was now the end of October; the weather was wet, the roads were bad, the ordinary modes of locomotion, scant enough at any time, were scantier than ever. With all possible haste he went forward, impatient of every delay that increased the risk of losing Mary altogether.

Arrived in the city of the Golden Gate, he wasted no time, but set a messenger to work to find out the locale of every one named Gray, and among them to make inquiries for Miss Ford. It was rather a primitive way of discovering a person's whereabouts, but it proved successful.

On the day he presented himself at Alfred Gray's house, Mrs. Gray was preparing to

pay visits, when Mary entered her dressing-room.

“Oh, Fanny, he has found me out,” she said.

“Impossible !” Mrs. Gray exclaimed, with a start ; but, glancing at a card Mary held, she breathed a sigh of relief. “How you startled me !” she said, laughing ; “I thought you meant that dreadful Loxdale man. What will you do ? Shall you see this Mr. Wrayburn ?”

“I suppose I must. It would look so strange to refuse,” Mary answered.

“Especially after coming such an immense distance to see you,” Fanny said, in a quizzing tone.

“Don’t, Fanny,” Mary said entreatingly.

“Well, then, I won’t. And really this is growing rather too serious. He is evidently very much in earnest. Don’t you think you ought to tell him everything, Mary ?”

“Perhaps I ought.”

She said no more, but turned away, and went with slow reluctant step to the drawing-room, where Wrayburn was awaiting her coming.

His back was turned to the door when she entered; but, hearing the trail of her dress upon the carpet, he looked round and came towards her.

"Are you surprised to see me here?" he asked, as he took her hand. She could not be actually discourteous, so she gave him her hand. But she was determined to steel herself against him and treat him with icy coldness.

"I am very much surprised, and I may say displeased also," she answered gravely. "I thought I had indicated to you in the plainest possible manner that I wished to end our acquaintance."

"If you mean that running away was such an indication, I can only say it was utterly lost upon me," Wrayburn said good-

humouredly, smiling down at her out of eyes that were softened and gladdened by the sight of her once more.

“This is not kind. You have no right to pursue me,” said Mary.

“Yes,” he answered, amused at her protest, “that is just what I have the right to do—to follow you to the ends of the earth if I choose. You cannot baffle me in this way, Mary. Surely you did not suppose that, when I came home and found you were gone, I should sit calmly down without making any further inquiries, or trying to find out the reason of your evanishment. Mary, why did you run away from me?”

She found it rather difficult to give an immediate answer to the question. There was in her a latent warmth of feeling very much opposed to that icy coldness of intention. With downcast eyes she stood before him as a parched pilgrim, who had

vowed not to drink, might stand beside some sparkling spring.

Wrayburn had pleasant little ways of his own that were hard to resist. His kindly eyes rested affectionately upon her. His large firm hand enclosed her small slender hand tenderly, yet with a deferential touch. He was more fashionably dressed than Mary had ever seen him, and looked so tall and stalwart. The air and sunshine of the hills were in the clear colour of his brown face. He was so pleasant to look upon, so desirable and lovable, yet she must send him away. A mutinous feeling arose within her, though she strove to crush it down.

"Mary dear, why did you run away from me?" he repeated.

"There was nothing else left for me to do. How could you expect me to stay there?" she said, in a voice quivering with emotion.

"You are not going to break my heart, are you?" he said.

The unexpected question was put so suddenly that she looked up in surprise.

"I do not understand you," she said.

"No, that is about the truth; you do not understand me, or you would not treat me as you have done," he replied. "I said just now I would follow you to the ends of the world, but I've no intention of becoming a bore and a weariness to you. Once for all, Mary, was it the truth, or was it an untruth, you told me that day in the school-house, when I asked you to be my wife?"

"I have never told you an untruth."

"Then if it was true that you loved me, as you confessed you did, why did you run away? Why do you say I could not expect you to stay there? If that be true, I refuse to accept your dismissals. Since you return my love, I insist upon my right to be accepted as your husband."

A man who *insists* that a lady shall accept him, and claims *a right* to be that

lady's husband, is a somewhat novel and difficult person to deal with, and her eyes widened with surprise as she heard him assert his claims thus fearlessly.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with almost a groan, "I would give worlds to be able to recall those words I spoke, to blot out that day from my life."

"I know there is something you are keeping back from me," he said, "and I feel a hesitation in pressing you to tell me what it is, because it is evidently something painful. Yet I think you must see how impossible it is for me to feel that I am justly treated."

"There is something," Mary said, after a long pause.

"Some reason that you think is strong enough to prevent our marriage. I am not a finical man, or given to exaggerating trifles. Will you not try to tell me your reason?"

There was another long pause. If his voice had been less soft, his manner less receptive and provocative of confidence, she might have found it easier to tell him. As it was, she stood reflective, and yet uneasy.

"Oh, Mary, you must tell me," he urged.

When she now raised her eyes, that air of uncertainty had wholly disappeared. Her voice was cold and steady.

"I am married already. My name is Mary Ford Loxdale," she said.

Wrayburn quietly dropped Mary's hand, and for a few moments stood still, staring at her. Then he turned away.

"I have been deceived in you," he said, "bitterly and shamefully deceived."

The mutinous feeling rose stronger than ever, yet she could not say a word to defend herself. Her heart swelled with the sense of injustice as she thought of all she had

suffered in the past with another man ; all she must suffer in the future because she had allowed herself to love this man. Had she not tried hard to do her duty ? Had she not cut herself adrift that she might deal justly and honourably with each ? And this was her reward. Wrayburn would go away believing her a worthless woman who had wilfully deceived him ; yet no self-defence could she offer, but sat silent and downcast like one oppressed by a guilty shame.

He had gone over to a table and taken up some ornamental trifle with hands that trembled a little, either from nervousness or indignation. After a while he laid the toy down and came across the room again.

“ I don’t ask what motive you had,” said he, “ for sailing under false colours ; of course you had some motive. But I do ask why you have allowed me to love you while concealing this from me ? ”

“ Have I ever courted your society, or

encouraged your attentions, Mr. Wrayburn ? ” she asked coldly.

“ No, you never have. But a man will put up with a good deal of discouragement, and not lose heart, so long as he believes the woman he has chosen is free.”

“ I did not wish it to be known in Swanneck that I was a convict’s wife.”

“ Would I have been likely to publish the fact ? Your secret would have been safe with me.”

“ I could not share a secret with you under such circumstances, Mr. Wrayburn. I did what I could—I left the place.”

Wrayburn looked at her keenly, with a steady, penetrating gaze. He understood her to mean that it was because she was a married woman she had struggled against any intimate friendship with him, and because she had loved him she would make no confessions of which he would be the sole recipient. Her shame and regret for

the one serious and condemnable confession she had made were intelligible to him now. He began to see the difficult part she had had to play, and to think of her less hardly.

“If I have blamed you too hastily,” he said, “it is because I hate and despise deceit. I have suffered enough already from deceitful people; and the thought that you have been keeping up a pretence all this time is intolerable to me. Better have told me the truth at once, and let me abide by it. I could at least have respected you; now I’m afraid I can’t even do that. You have done a very dishonourable thing, and one not easy to forgive.”

“I do not desire forgiveness,” Mary replied very quietly. “The feelings that will do most to sunder us are the feelings to cultivate. If you had accepted my decision, and not followed me here, you might have been able to keep your good opinion

of me, which I have been forced now to destroy."

"A good opinion founded upon a fraud!" Wrayburn exclaimed indignantly. For a few moments he stood irresolute, anger and grief struggling for the supremacy.

"There is nothing more to be said, I suppose," he said at last. "I am evidently destined to be very unfortunate with women."

It was bitter pain to Mary to be classed, as he was clearly classing her in his own mind, with the heartless and mercenary woman who had spoiled his youth. But she would not attempt to justify herself, though her heart was sick with pain and grief and the sense of abandonment.

"Good-bye," he said abruptly, holding out his hand.

She laid her hand in his, but she would not look up or meet his eyes. She would not sweep aside the veil of misunderstanding that swung between them, or respond to the

lingering clasp of his hand. If she chose now to tell him her whole sad history she felt there would be abundant sympathy and a generous forgiveness. But she would do none of these things, just because she loved him, and was firmly resolved to let the breach between them widen as it would. With utterly unresponsive exterior she forced herself to say "good-bye," and a moment later Wrayburn was gone.

If in that hour she had been alone on a raft in mid-ocean, the last of a shipwrecked company, she could not have felt lonelier or more hopeless. Why, she wondered in dumb despair, should such things be? Why had she met this man, and loved him, to her own torment, and the destruction of that peace of mind to which he had attained?

Had some unknown influence been drawing her, year after year, nearer and nearer to that mountain solitude where he was waiting for her? Had that meeting and

this parting all been written upon the tablets of her life before ever she came into the world? Had she only now accomplished the sacrifice to which she had been foredoomed?

She had no strength to wrestle with the Infinite, or to stand up and demand reasons from the Eternal. She might rend her heart and stretch forth her hands in anguish, but there would come no voice or answer. The forces which had borne her hither and thither were beyond and outside of herself. Was it demanded of her that, in maintaining her integrity, she should oppose herself to powers unknown and illimitable? What if it were all in vain keeping the gaze uplifted to the starry ideal, while the feet were gashed and bruised upon life's road? Coming from the darkness, going to the darkness; the little span of human life and endeavour a mere atom whirled along by the Time-spirit, and passing like a

breath upon a glass, how should it be all so clear where evil began and good ended?

Years before she had set herself very steadfastly to follow good, and lo! evil had overtaken her; and the twain had allied themselves in such a way that she could scarcely distinguish friend from foe. Had she done good? had she done evil? Viewed as a whole, had the work of her life been a right one or a wrong one, or was there a work of any sort in reality? Would suffering count as a life-work? There seemed nothing else to show. She had succeeded in nothing, and was regarded as base and contemptible, even by the man who loved her.

She had believed in herself, in her purity of mind and purpose, but even this prop seemed likely to give way. It did not look of much use to go on respecting herself when she could not get others to respect her. The thought suggested itself that, as we

naturally value ourselves more highly than others value us, self-respect might be another name for a dim perception of our own unworthiness. There was no solid ground beneath her feet, the old foundations on which she had rested were so grievously shaken. Twilight brooded over her rushing tumultuous thoughts. There was no answer for her doubts, no strength to fortify her weakness, no promise of a clearer vision. Through the darkness of her soul rang the desolate, beseeching cry, "Why hast *Thou* forsaken me?" It is the echoing cry of humanity in its dolorous eclipse, as, all unvestured and shuddering, it plunges alone to the sombre depths of an unexplored agony.

Mary's reverie was broken in upon by Mrs. Gray's entrance. That excellent woman had as much curiosity as the rest of her neighbours, and a thoroughly feminine interest in a love-affair. So when Wrayburn

arrived, she had taken off her bonnet and postponed her visiting that she might see how this love-affair was conducted.

"Well, Mary!" she said, with a significant inflection.

"He is gone," Mary said, as if just awaking from a dream.

"Of course he is gone. He went more than an hour ago," Fanny replied. "Did you tell him everything?"

"Not everything; enough to send him away."

"I'm glad of that. It is the right thing to do; and now you will feel satisfied that the whole affair is ended."

Mary looked at her with a peculiar expression. "If Alfred had just left the house, and you knew you would never see him again, would you feel well satisfied, Fanny?"

"Oh, good gracious, no! But that is so different. It would be dreadful, because he is my husband."

“No, not because he is your husband, but because you love him. I have faced many hard things in my time, but I cannot yet face the fact that I shall never see Lawrence Wrayburn again.”

Mrs. Gray looked rather startled. “Mary,” she exclaimed, “you shock and amaze me! It is dreadful to hear you speak like that. It is wicked to tolerate such a feeling in your heart.”

“No, not wicked,” Mary replied. “It may be foolish, inconvenient, contemptible, if you like, but not wicked. We cannot help loving one who is lovable, with whom we are in sympathy, to whom our hearts go out spontaneously. It is the position I am in that is wicked, not anything else.”

“But surely it comes to the same thing in the end. A woman cannot love some one else and remain true to her marriage vow. I’m astonished to hear you support such a theory.”

“Fanny, you are ready to accuse me now, but were not you the one who most strongly urged me to leave the man I married, to have nothing further to do with him?”

“Yes, for a woman cannot be expected to remain with a brute. That has nothing to do with it.”

“I think it has. The marriage vow makes no exceptions; it includes the worse with the better. If I have done wrong, it was in failing to see that the step I had taken was irrevocable. He was a brute, you say. Well, it was my destiny to marry a brute. I thought to shake myself free. When he was coming out of prison, I hid myself in a distant corner of the world. My name, my marriage, my whole past life were all carefully kept secret. It seemed perfectly justifiable. I believed I could succeed in living a new and secure life. I see now the fallacy it was. As if I could drop a burden when I chose because it was heavy

and painful. As if I could escape from what it was intended I should endure. As if I could hide disgrace and infamy because I tried to sever myself from them. They belong to me; they are part and parcel of my life. And because I tried to ignore and evade them, a worse thing has fallen upon me."

The sad tones of her voice, her cynical despair, her cold severity, chilled Mrs. Gray with a feeling of enduring pain and hopelessness. She felt an intuitive sympathy with Mary, but the traditions of a smooth, conventional life encumbered her. She was unable to comprehend the struggle going on in Mary's heart—that struggle, to sweep away the veils and coverings of the imagination with which we try to muffle up life's pain and difficulty.

"Don't you think you are getting a little tragical, Mary?" she suggested.

"Tragical is not exactly the word," Mary

answered. "Don't suppose I am thinking only of Mr. Wrayburn. I regard him merely as a secondary difficulty arising from the primary difficulty I have made for myself."

"What difficulty?"

"The difficulty which always comes from doing evil that good may come; from entering upon a course of weak, selfish deception. The wrong I have done does not end with myself. I have injured a man who loves me honestly and well. If I had been less set on protecting myself, I could have controlled events sufficiently to have saved him from this unhappiness. I am not false to my marriage vow in loving some one else; but I was false to it when I deliberately left the man I had given myself to and sworn never to leave till death parted us. While life lasts I am Jasper Loxdale's wife, and at any time he can compel me by my oath to return to him."

Mrs. Gray was silent, feeling somewhat oppressed by Mary's uncompromising self-introspection.

"Mary dear," she said at length, reproachfully, "would your best friends have advised you to leave him, if they had not felt there was ample reason for such advice?"

"No; but those who loved me most were naturally very partial advisers," Mary replied. "And the fact that I had friends at my back enabled me to be so independent. Doubtless my life was not more intolerable than the life many women are compelled to lead. My sins are the sins of Sodom—'pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness,' " she added bitterly.

"Oh, Mary, you who have always been so patient, so self-sacrificing and self-restrained!"

"You are mistaken; I am naturally proud and impatient. I suffered far more from the low, vulgar atmosphere of Captain Loxdale's

peculiar forms of badness than from even his blows and abuse. There was such a heap of the meanest trickery surrounding me, such utter violence to one's self-respect, such dishonesty and treachery on all sides, that to be free from it, and the man who produced it, was my one desire."

"And surely it cannot be denied that it was better every way to be freed from such degradation."

"I have not escaped the degradation; that is the worst part of it all. Mr. Wrayburn and I would have to part and go our several ways; but I would give much that when parted I might still stand high in his estimation. I can't accept his love, but that I should be despised and condemned; that he should look upon me as some vulgar adventuress hiding a shady career, some despicable fool separated from her own husband, yet falling in love with some one else in a limp, reluctant fashion;—oh, how I hate to

think of it ! Did he not accuse me of deceit and dishonesty—the two very things from which I have tried to dissociate myself ? ”

“ He will not think so badly of you, Mary.”

“ He will, indeed he will ; and he is not a man who will readily change his opinion without good reason. He will always connect me in his mind with those traits he most hates and despises. I have that for my consolation.”

Her voice faltered and broke, though in all other respects she was perfectly calm.

Fanny was quite unable to utter any of those commonplaces which would have come readily enough under ordinary circumstances. She was distressed by Mary's pain and humiliation, and the bitterness that accompanied it. Vaguely she felt that Mary's sorrow was caused less from the necessity of renunciation than from being misunderstood by this inexorable man.

“ Why did you not tell him more of your

history?" she asked—"enough to make him see there is no blame attaching to yourself?"

"I don't know," Mary answered. "But, after all, what does it matter whether he blames or exonerates me? I never had any sympathy with scaffold speeches. When you have ended you will be hanged all the same, so the sooner it's done the better."

"Mary, you cannot deceive me. You are sorry Mr. Wrayburn has gone away carrying with him a wrong impression."

"Yes, I am; but it's too late now to alter it."

There was silence between them for a time; then Fanny rose.

"We will not sit here in the dark any longer," she said. "Alfred will not be home to dinner to-night; so we may as well have dinner at once, and try to get more cheerful."

"I don't want any dinner, Fanny; I can't eat," Mary objected. "I want to be alone for a little while, to think things out more

clearly. Let me go and lie down for an hour or two; my head aches badly."

This was such a reasonable request that Fanny could offer no remonstrance. She kissed Mary, bidding her be of good cheer, and to bathe her forehead with *eau de Cologne*, and to remember that too much solitude and silence were not kindly medicines wherewith to "minister to a mind diseased."





CHAPTER XI.

WHEN Mary had gone upstairs, Mrs. Gray went into the cheerfully lighted dining-room, and sat down to dinner alone.

She did not approve of all Mary's conduct in this Wrayburn affair. But she loved the offender, and her heart was by no means a Spartan heart. It was quite possible for her to accuse and forgive in the one instant.

There was a stately sort of patience about Mary ; a silent solitariness in all her sorrows that made it difficult to approach her with sympathy. It is so easy to hurt rather than to heal ; to insult, though the intention is to console. However much Mrs. Gray might

disapprove, she felt conscious of something far from satisfactory in Mary's cold dismissal of Wrayburn; something indefinite and incomplete.

To one of her active and zealous temperament, such a feeling was very irritating. Moreover, a woman who has been taught that whatever she does is sure to be charming and the right thing, has a most invincible dislike to letting things alone.

There was a strong temptation to interfere in the present case from the fact that the name of Wrayburn's hotel was pencilled in the corner of his card. As he was thus easy to find, it was easy to persuade herself that she would be failing in her duty if she neglected this opportunity of explaining to him all that Mary had left unsaid, and which it appeared so desirable to make known. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter" was, she thought, very sound advice. So she resolved to act

upon it, and finished her dinner with great celerity.

Wrayburn was lying on the sofa in his sitting-room when his visitor was announced.

He had not declined bodily sustenance, as Mary had done. Dinner had been eaten, but eaten in no very pleasant humour, and he now looked pale and jaded, as men look after great fatigue or mental disturbance.

In truth his temper was in a very turbulent state. Prohibited by some unknown force from any attempt to alter the direction of his own life, apparently he was always to be the clay, and never the potter. Tired of the simply passive state, and indignant that he should be unable to control the tide of his affairs, his manhood had risen in revolt against these limitations imposed upon him from without.

For the second time his heart-springing plans had been opposed by a woman and overthrown by guile. Disappointment in

the character of the woman he loved was, for the time, even more acute than his pain in losing her, or regret for the future despoiled of its bright hopes.

To him in this weary and dejected mood there entered Mrs. Gray, fresh, fair, and captivating. There was a simple girlish candour in her manner mingled with the *savoir faire* of the well-bred woman that was very attractive, and Wrayburn at once felt its influence. With a little private wonderment, yet some intuitive knowledge of his visitor's identity, he rose and bowed.

"I must apologize for coming here, a stranger to you, but I am Fanny Gray, Mary's friend; perhaps you have heard her speak of me," Mrs. Gray began, raising her pretty face with a trustful and conciliatory smile.

"I have heard her speak of you very often," he made answer. "Is it at her request you have come?"

“Oh dear, no,” Mrs. Gray said emphatically, seating herself in the chair that he drew forward for her. “She is not even aware that I had any intention of coming; and, indeed, she would decidedly object, I know. I have come, Mr. Wrayburn, to tell you, if you will allow me, much that you are altogether ignorant of, and that I think Mary was unwise in keeping so religiously secret. You are condemning her without any knowledge of what her troubles have been, or what reasons she had for going to Swanneck. Unless you positively prefer to be unjust, I think you will hear me.”

“Why do you challenge my sense of justice as if it were useless appealing to any gentler feelings?” Wrayburn said, slightly smiling. “Naturally I am hurt and ruffled by what has occurred to-day, but there’s not such obstinacy in me that I prefer to keep my present opinions about it if they are mistaken and can be altered. I will thank-

fully hear anything you have to tell me, if you are sure she is not opposed to my hearing it."

"No; she confessed to me that she was sorry she had not told you herself, and regretted that it was then too late. It did not appear to me to be too late, so I came."

Fanny's feminine and confiding yet somewhat playful manner amused Wrayburn, while at the same time it rather disconcerted him.

"Perhaps you will let me tell you a little of Mary's history. No one knows it better; for I think I am the very oldest friend she has," she continued, seeing that he hesitated.

"I'll most willingly hear it," he said, with an inclination of his head.

"She and I were schoolgirls together," said Fanny. "Her parents died when she was very young, and it was with her grandfather she made her home when her education was finished. He was a man of good

position then, and a near neighbour of ours. It was at our house Mary met Captain Loxdale. My brother had just entered the army. He brought Captain Loxdale over from the town where their regiment was quartered, to an evening party, but we knew nothing of him. Mary was not seventeen then, and you can have no idea how pretty she was. He fell in love with her at first sight, and I suppose she fell in love with him; though really I think the poor child was only intoxicated by the adulation and deference and everything that a schoolgirl is so unaccustomed to. But it was a very hasty love-making, for within three months they were married."

Here Fanny paused and looked at Wrayburn to note the effect of her narrative upon him. He was listening attentively, and nodded his head slightly when she ceased speaking.

"The marriage was not a great success," she continued. "When the first flourish of

trumpets was over things went wrong very quickly. There was a singular dearth of money, a good deal of debt and contrivance, with many shabby actions that Mary was very unused to, for Mr. Vanburgh is the soul of honour. Then Captain Loxdale did not stand well with the regiment. His brother officers were not cordial, and their wives snubbed Mary. Gradually she had to face the fact that she had made a terrible mistake, and could expect little happiness. Her husband was a gambler and spendthrift, a man thoroughly unscrupulous and insincere. In fact," added the little woman, waxing rhetorical, "there was not a redeeming feature in him. He was extravagant and dissipated, cruel, sensual, hypocritical, and dishonest in every thought and act."

"Mrs. Gray," Wrayburn said, as she paused, "when a woman makes a very unfortunate marriage, do you think the faults are entirely on the man's side?"

“Not always, perhaps; but I think it was so in this instance. Mary was naturally fitted to make an excellent wife.”

“Then how did this bad marriage come to pass?”

Fanny looked puzzled. “You often see very good women married to very bad men,” she said.

“And I’ve always fancied, though possibly I may be quite mistaken, that it showed a certain deficiency in the woman herself, some lack of higher qualities and instincts, when she has made such a bad selection.”

“Poor child! what could she know of men or of the world?”

“All the more reason for reticence in her dealings with men. A girl who is carried off her feet by the first man who makes love to her is generally carried away in reality by her own inordinate vanity, and is not much better than a fool.”

Fanny looked rather shocked. “Oh, you

are very severe!" she said, in a tone of remonstrance.

"No, not severe," Wrayburn replied, "but we all know the story of guileless youth entrapped by villainous man; and I confess I have scant sympathy with the innocence that cries aloud upon the housetops for recognition."

"Mary did not cry aloud, or play the injured innocent," Fanny broke in quickly.

"I don't say she did. But you know the proverb, 'like to like.' It's not so easy for a man, however clever he may be, to hide a thoroughly bad character under a deceptive surface. The cloven hoof is sure to show itself somewhere."

"But, Mr. Wrayburn, a very young girl is not keen-sighted or analytical. A handsome face, fine manners, and fine words—these make the impression upon her. She does not look for worth, but she takes for granted it is there."

“Perhaps so. But I have only interrupted you.”

“Well, I won’t offer any excuses for Mary,” Fanny went on. “She certainly married a thoroughly bad man, whether she herself was to blame or not. He was destitute of common honesty or proper feeling. Gambling seems to have been his worst fault, for he was not exactly a drunkard, though he drank when things went exceptionally well or ill with him. Nor was he vulgar. He liked elegance, but did not in the least care how it was obtained. He was always up to his eyes in debt, and found a positive delight in baffling his creditors, for intrigue of every kind came quite natural to him. I suppose it was part of his gambling propensity. One disgrace after another came upon him so fast that he was cashiered at last. After that he became more and more disreputable, and little better than a card-sharper. He lived the life of a gipsy

almost, going from one race-meeting to another, and mixing with book-makers, horse-dealers, and all that sort of people. Mary's small fortune was soon swallowed up, and the same fate threatened her grandfather's. Poor Mr. Vanburgh was quite heartbroken, and would have parted with his last shilling to save her from ruin. As it is, he has lent and given so much, and paid away money in so many different directions, that he has been quite reduced to poverty. At last he induced Mary to go home and live with him again, and she did remain for a time, until Captain Loxdale promised amendment. I leave you to judge whether he was able to keep his promise. After a man has led the life of an adventurer for some time, I think he cannot live any other. He likes the latitude, the excitement, and constant change. Besides, he loses all decent connections who could help him to be more respectable. Occasionally, I believe,

he used to write for sporting papers, and once he was secretary to some sort of sporting club; but he got into trouble through misappropriating funds, and, though they did not prosecute, they turned him away."

Fanny paused again to let her words sink down into her listener's mind, and be there fully digested.

He was playing abstractedly with his watch-chain, twisting it round and round his finger in neat little circles. The sort of man Fanny was describing was not unknown to him, and he was trying to put himself in Mary's place—trying to grasp the tone of thought likely to grow from such a connection.

Would a woman so placed develop only fortitude, self-sacrifice, and a sustained patience? or would she not be just as likely to develop selfishness, craftiness, and all faults of a meaner nature?

Sighing, he dropped the little gold circles into the palm of his hand, and glanced at his visitor.

“Well, Mrs. Gray?” he said.

“Well,” Fanny replied, proceeding with her tale, “Mary went back to her husband. But his amendment was very short-lived. And yet—strange as it may sound—in his own way he was fond of her. Had she been content to go his way he would have been kind to her, so far as such a man could be kind to any one. He was both sleek and brutal, and was always wanting to make use of her for his own base ends. A second time Mary left him, and Mr. Vanburgh’s dread of him was so great that he removed to Longbridge, a town in the south of England, where no one knew them. For a time they lived in quiet; then he discovered them, and began to persecute Mary. This time she was quite firm, and refused to have anything to do with him.

She used to give music-lessons to eke out their small means, and the wretch knew this. He watched for her, determined to have revenge since he could have nothing else. It was winter-time, and in the dusk he waited among the shrubs about the garden gate, intending to throw vitriol at her. That evening she felt ill, and sent the young maid-servant with a note of apology to her pupil. As it was raining, Mary put her own cloak around the girl. They were about the same height; he recognized the cloak, and mistook the girl for Mary. As she hurried past, he threw the vitriol at her and made off. The girl did not seem severely injured at the time, but she has since become quite blind. Mr. Vanburgh has paid her fifty pounds a year ever since."

"And this Loxdale—what of him?" Wrayburn asked.

"He got three years' imprisonment.

Every one thought the sentence remarkably light for such a grave offence. But the girl did not grow blind immediately, though she was a good deal disfigured. When his term had nearly expired, we all advised Mary to leave the country, to drop his name, and begin anew where she would have some chance of security. We were returning here at the time, and brought her with us. We introduced her to the McIntyres, and through their means she went on to Swan-neck, just because it seemed about the last place in the world where he would be likely to find her. The rest you know, Mr. Wrayburn."

"The rest I know," he repeated mechanically.

"But you don't know—nor does Mary—that her husband is in this city at this very moment."

"What is he doing here?"

"Looking for Mary. He knew we were

settled here, and, having in some way discovered that she had left England with us, he came straight here. He has had many interviews with my husband. He has even threatened to prosecute him for unlawfully detaining his wife. At other times he is more civil, and asks for the loan of a dollar."

"Does he suppose she would return to him?"

"I should think not."

"Then, what was the use of coming?"

"Just to try what he can do. You must remember he has always been able to get money through Mary; by bringing sufficient pressure to bear upon her, he has drained Mr. Vanburgh's purse. I don't think he can hope to get her back, but he does hope to torment her. He is full of malice and revenge, and, you see, they paid him to keep away before. So, either way, he feels that to secure her would be to secure money."

"And how does he live now?"

“ I believe he teaches fencing and boxing, and such things, and plays billiards, or anything else that offers a chance.”

“ Rather a precarious living, I should say.”

“ It has always been the same since his disgrace.”

Wrayburn remained silent, and Fanny rose. She drew nearer to him, and looked into his face with a soft gravity in her eyes.

“ Mr. Wrayburn,” she said, “ I have told you everything now. You see what Mary’s existence has been—a complete slavery. She has a very steadfast nature, and cannot easily change. Her meeting with you has been only an additional unhappiness. There is no blame attaching to her, for when she went to Swanneck there was no reason for supposing such complications would arise. She only followed the advice that all her friends gave, and under the circumstances she has acted as honourably as she could in

the face of great difficulties. Her one thought was to escape from this man and hide herself. Can you blame her? Could *you* support the thought of recommencing such a life? never secure, never at rest, either with him or away from him. If he was bad before, will he be improved by convict life? Remember how he has ill-used her. To speak of it even now to her is like touching her with red-hot iron, she has so deeply felt her degradation. Think of all this, Mr. Wrayburn."

"You are a good woman, Mrs. Gray," Wrayburn answered earnestly. "I am heartily grateful to you for telling me all Mary's story. I have known very little about her, it seems, after all."

"I shall be quite satisfied with the result of my journey if I can succeed in making you believe she is a sincere, honourable, and high-minded woman," Fanny replied, with beaming eyes. "And now, Mr. Wrayburn,

my servant is waiting downstairs to see me home, and I will say good night."

He bade her good night, and escorted her downstairs. When he came back he shut the door, and began to pace up and down the length of the room with the steady, ceaseless step of a sentry.

His heart was sore with the pain and mortification of his loss, but not with anger as it had been. The thought uppermost in his mind was how little he had really known the woman that he loved; how much more needful and deserving of love she was than he had imagined. He was too greatly concerned for Mary to think much about his own loss. He could at least fall back upon his old peaceful life. She had no peaceful life to fall back upon, nor any peaceful future to which she could look forward. A prisoner as she was in the most detestable of all bondage, to keep as distant as possible from her master and persecutor, was all the happi-

ness she could promise herself. A very negative happiness !

Yet, although his mind was more occupied by Mary's sad position and prospects than by his own immediate loss, his disappointment was not the less keen.

It is a mistake to suppose disappointment is most acutely felt in early youth. There is a louder lamentation, a greater surprise and indignation at the assaults of evil fortune, but the impression wears quickly away ; new hopes soon replace those which have been abandoned. In mature life it is not thus. There is greater resignation, for the chances of success have been more fairly weighed by the light of reason and knowledge. Experience has taught that no man has a lien upon happiness. But the furrows left behind by disappointment are deep and lasting. At thirty or thirty-five life appears less il-limitable than at twenty. There is less time left in which to retrieve the past ; less ex-

orbitant expectation ; less faith in the compensations the future may contain.

Wrayburn had expanded considerably during his six years in Swanneck. Once he had been aghast at the total of his injuries, dumbly appealing to gods and men to witness such monstrous injustice. Now he could overlook himself in his anxious care for the woman who had brought upon him this fresh pain, this new loss. Entering with closest sympathy into her feelings, he cast about in his mind for some way of showing her she was entitled to a claim upon him for evermore as a sharer in the calamity which had befallen them. He did not by any means exonerate her from all blame, or feel that he had been fairly treated ; but, remembering that she loved him, and had suffered on his account, he took a large way of dealing with things, shutting his eyes to all that was merely personal.

Acting upon a sudden impulse, and sitting down at a table where there were writing materials, he hastily wrote the following :—

“MY DEAR MARY,

“Can you forgive the harshness and injustice of my words to-day? I spoke very roughly, but try to believe it was the roughness of a man feeling intolerably hurt and irritated.

“Since then, that good little woman has been here. She gave me the key to your history, and has told me all that you thought it expedient to conceal. You can understand the sort of impression it has left upon my mind. When you spoke of disgrace and misfortune, of being well drilled in patience, when you bade me be thankful for my freedom, how little did I understand you or penetrate through your reserve. Now I can only blame myself for my own stupidity.

“I cannot in the least express what I feel, for feelings are difficult things to write down, and profit little when written.

“This at least may be said—our love has been honest and of good report. Don't associate it in your mind with thoughts of disgrace and shame. What is good in itself will remain with us as lasting good if we only give it a fair chance. No life into which a great love has once entered can ever be altogether mean, vain, or purposeless. Feeling this strongly myself, I would like to

impress it upon you. Life need not be regarded as a failure because we can never be more to each other than we are now. No one shall persuade me I am not a better and a richer man for having loved you. Don't try to forget me or to disparage my memory. I will do you good and not ill all my life long. Wherever you may be, in whatever circumstances, you will know that somewhere in the world there is one to whom you are sacred ; one whose whole tide of thought and feeling will ever flow to you, and surround you, with the deepest reverence and affection.

" I use those words advisedly, for reverence and affection are not bound by the limits of companionship or possession. If you were fast my wife as Church and law could make you, I could do no more than give you the best that is in me, and that you shall ever have.

" I have not been able to say what I mean in these few sentences. But another meeting is undesirable, and, as this will be our last communication, I choose to add somewhat to the bare ' God be with you ' form of valediction. Always, and in all places, believe me,

" Yours most faithfully,

" LAWRENCE WRAYBURN."

Without reading over what he had written, he folded the letter and put it in an envelope, and then touched the bell.

“Have this note sent off at once,” he said, handing it to the waiter who made his appearance, “and tell the messenger he need not wait for an answer.”





CHAPTER XII.

MEANWHILE Mary lay upon her bed and tried to think, but her thoughts would not crystalize. Insensibly her mind slipped into reverie.

As in dreams dim pageants pass and re-pass before our slumbering senses, so vaguely the drama of her youth swept before her.

She was not, and never had been, one of those weeping, praying, agonizing women whose sole desire is to be in loving union with their kind. Yet not less had the iron entered into her soul.

Hers had been spiritual sorrows rather than material, though the latter had not been

wanting. She had struggled to maintain integrity, faith, loyalty, pride, honour, dignity ; a soul-confusing struggle, in which she had been over-matched and compelled to retire into obedient indifference. With courage and perseverance she had subordinated herself to a life empty of aught that could satisfy her nature. No nunnery enclosed a heart to which the chilling calm of renunciation had more deeply penetrated.

This was what she was looking back upon as she lay in the dark, still room.

She had shut herself up alone, actuated by the same feelings which have made silence and solitude a necessity to those in all ages who lift up their hearts with their hands, crying for a gleam of Heaven-sent light and truth to guide them amid the falsities and perplexities of human life and error.

What seemed to lie before her was a "Mount of Pain," dimly revealed as yet through obscuring clouds, but growing ever

plainer. To this her feet were reluctantly yet perforce drawing nearer. Somewhere she had made a mistake; somewhere she had failed in her duty; where and when she was determined to decide.

Was it her duty to continue a fugitive from her husband, or to return deliberately to him and submit her neck to the yoke?

She sat up suddenly, feeling strangled by the very thought, as though an actual hand were clutching her throat.

"Must I do *that*? Could I return to it? I feel as if it would be the very death of my soul," she said aloud, and trembled.

Voices within her leaped up to protest against such a decision. "You shall live to repent yet," Loxdale had said. "You must protect yourself," her friends had said. "I have been shamefully deceived in you," Wrayburn had said. Mechanically she put up her hands to her ears as if to shut out this babel of voices from her brain.

“Oh, that I knew what it is that I should do, or what is right, or what is wrong!” she groaned, rocking herself to and fro, with her hands pressed against her head.

Early in her married life she had recognized that, having chosen badly, she must not look for happiness; but, all undaunted, she had resolved that her own life should not therefore be destitute of worth. And now, stricken with heavy sorrow, she confessed she had worked no worthy work. Fictions, subterfuges, and secrecies, what had they done for her? They had deprived her of the good opinion of the man whose good opinion was the one last thing she desired to keep for herself. So much had they done for her, and no more, save to leave a wound in her heart that neither time nor distance could efface.

She had just thrown herself wearily down again, when a soft step drew near, and a light shone under the door. There

came a gentle tap, and Fanny's voice asked—

“ Mary, are you asleep ? ”

“ No,” Mary replied. “ What is it you want ? ”

“ I don't wish to disturb you,” Fanny said, entering the room with her lamp in one hand and a letter in the other, “ but a letter has just come for you, and you will need a light to read it.”

She set the lamp down on a table, and leaned over Mary as she put the letter into her hand.

“ My dear, I hope you won't be angry with me,” she said, “ but I have seen Mr. Wrayburn and told him a good deal, and I think the letter is from him. The messenger said no answer was required.” Then she hurried away, closing the door gently behind her.

Mary rose, and, seating herself at the table, opened her letter with trembling fingers and

a palpitating heart. What could he have to say to her now ?

“Like dew upon the parched ground,” upon her scorched, despairing spirit fell the words he had written straight from his honest heart.

Leaning back in her chair, her hands, still holding the letter, dropped listlessly upon her lap. Dreamily floating to her memory came back the early days at Swanneck, when she had first known him and had tried not to love him ; the songs he had sung in the little school-house ; the flowers he had given her ; the pictures he had painted for her. She recalled their parting on the evening when he had left Swanneck, and for the second time, had asked her to be his wife. The scene rose vividly before her—the deep lake set among the wild hills ; the distant mountains with their lonely heads in the clouds ; the gloom of the dusky pine woods ; and chilly twilight gathering over all, fit

emblem, she thought, of the cold shade which lay upon their path henceforth.

Often had she wondered why it was that Wrayburn so attracted her. She had met many men who were better looking, better mannered, more accomplished, more seemingly attractive in every way. Yet for one of these she had never turned her head a second time, or given a second thought, or felt the slightest interest.

There was a strong faith in Wrayburn that showed itself in a certain happy, self-contented confidence, and a passionateness that gave vigour to all he said or did. Because the day-dreams of his youth had been no more substantial than "the baseless fabric of a vision," and he had missed his mark, he had not therefore concluded all unrealized aspirations were illusions. Vigorous in health and buoyant in spirits, without a trace of worldliness, yet not a dreamer, his lonely years had left upon him no

evidences of a narrow or exclusive bent. The man's kindly heart had grown purer, simpler, and more fraternal from living close to nature. He was one of the few fortunate ones who seem able to retain "a young lamb's heart among the full-grown flocks." The outer workaday world, with its transient joys and sorrows, defeats and victories, was far less a real world to him than the hidden life in the faith and light of which he lived and walked.

It was this apprehension of something higher than himself, and reverence for something better than himself and the passing interests of his own lifetime, that had bound Mary's soul to his. Beyond even the need of happiness, there had always been in her the need of something to revere. Her lot had been cast so entirely among people who were wholly materialized, that her grandfather and Wrayburn were the only really spiritual lives she had ever met. They

responded to all the unsatisfied longings which had made her life a doleful blank when not actively unhappy; to love those two was second nature; not to love them an impossibility.

With a heavy sigh, she roused herself from her retrospective train of thought and turned again to the letter. Glancing at it, her eyes fell upon the words, "I could do no more than give you the best that is in me, and that you shall ever have."

To whom, then, did *she* owe the best that was in her? Clearly not to this man. No, not to the man she loved, but to that other man, whose nature was wholly diseased by sin; into whose mind vice had eaten like a gangrene; who had no longer any perception of purity or any desire for goodness. To that man she was "fast bound by Church and law."

The steep, sharp outlines of that mount were becoming fearfully plain to her. The

hand of the man who loved her was pointing the way, his voice was cheering her on. Whether Wrayburn so intended it or not, she interpreted his whole letter as an encouragement to return to her first duty and make the best of it.

The supreme hour of her suffering had arrived. She must decide with herself whether she would seek her husband or continue flying from him. The question was not altered by the arrival of Wrayburn's letter. He had merely thrown the weight of his influence to one end of the balance. To entrench herself behind fictions meant comparative security, but it had been bought with too great a price. To cast aside such fictions meant the acceptance of infamy. She shuddered at the thought of stepping back into that abyss. Her pride revolted against seeking reunion with such a man. But all the more plainly she felt she would do it ; she would protect herself no longer.

Folding her arms upon the table, she laid her head down upon them, for it was heavy and fevered by long and strenuous thought. But no relief was gained. Her outer eyes being closed only made her inner vision more morbidly acute.

She thought of the scenes she had witnessed ; of the vile language often addressed to her ; of the blows and bruises she had received ; of the shameful men and shameless women who had formed her husband's set ; of the alternate flattery and intimidation to which she had been subjected by the blacklegs who surrounded her.

She thought of the days when, hot and wounded from the fight, she had escaped to her grandfather, and found with him an asylum that had about it an autumnal sadness, stillness, and hopelessness. She thought of the *château d'un pauvre diable* far away in lonely Swanneck, and the warm heart of the solitary man among "the everlasting hills."

To that heart she would still be sacred. There was something comforting in the remembrance of his promise and the knowledge that he would be true to it. Especially was it comforting when she thought how that much-valued love was but a "broken light" in itself—a ray from the great and perfect Light.

She sat up again, pushed away her disordered hair from her face, and leaned her aching head back upon the cushions of the chair. The hours passed, but, buried in thought, she lost count of them.

Gradually a merciful lethargy stole over her sorrowful, wide-reaching reverie. Her vague waking fancies and reminiscences glided stealthily into those of dreams. While she yet felt struggling with her difficulties, in reality she slept.





CHAPTER XIII.

“**F**ANNY, say no more ; the thing may as well be ended. If we talked till to-morrow we should only go on repeating the same arguments. Mary’s mind is evidently made up, and I’m partly persuaded that she may be right in the main.”

It was thus Alfred Gray concluded a debate which had lasted until he himself was out of temper, his wife quite hysterical, and Mary ready to faint with sheer fatigue.

“It’s actually criminal,” Fanny exclaimed vehemently, “when every one has plotted and planned and contrived to keep him away from you, for you to go deliberately

seeking him. Your poor grandfather ! what will he say ? It will be his death-blow. I call it the most frightful ingratitude and recklessness ; for you *know* you can't support the life that wretch has always led you."

It was then Alfred bade his wife to say no more. There was silence for a time, or rather cessation from speech, for Fanny continued to sob aloud with unabated vigour. Wearied by this, Alfred turned to Mary.

"I am entirely at your service," said he. "If you really intend to pay this fellow a visit, I can put my hand on him at any time. Perhaps the sooner it is over the better, since we can't persuade you to forego it altogether."

Mary, who was dressed for the street, rose at once. "I am ready," she said.

Alfred paused and looked compassionately at her. "Forlorn hopes and martyrdoms require extra courage," he said, with a sort of kindly severity. "Are you sure yours is

screwed to the sticking-place, and will not break down?"

Mary shook her head like one going to her doom, past speech, but still steadfast, and she quietly followed him out.

She was very slightly acquainted with San Francisco, but when they reached the city she saw that the farther they travelled the more shabby became the neighbourhoods. During the journey she never spoke, until the driver stopped before a dingy-looking cigar-shop.

"Is this the place?" she asked sharply.

"Yes. You had better wait a moment while I go in and see if he is here."

Alfred went into the shop and held a brief conversation with a very elaborately dressed but pasty-faced young man, who looked as if he "sat up nights considerable."

This youth, having intimated his belief that "the Cap" was at home, opened a door

leading on to a wide expanse of passage, and held it open while Alfred brought Mary in.

“You know whar to find him,” the spruce youth remarked to Alfred, who was evidently not unknown to him.

“All right,” Alfred rejoined, and the door swung to again.

This wilderness of a dark passage found an end in an interminable staircase. The atmosphere gave the impression that the place was inhabited by a great number of people, all having a rooted objection to ventilation. The smell of various dishes now in process of cooking came up from some lower region, and mingled with the spent savours of dishes cooked and eaten a long time previously. There was a curious odour as of objectionable beds in unseen corners, mixed with an overpowering smell of paraffin, which arose obviously from a dark stain on one landing, the result of freshly

spilt oil. Over all hung a heavy mist and the scent of stale tobacco.

“What is this place?” Mary inquired, as they halted for a moment’s rest before attacking another flight of these endless stairs. “Who lives here?”

“‘All sorts and conditions of men,’” Alfred replied. “Part of it is a German club, I believe—the upper part. The rest is a sort of Tom Tiddler’s ground. Every one is poor here; all shady and extremely doubtful; yet they come here to pick up gold and silver.”

“Is it a gambling-house?”

“Partly, and also a lodging-house; and even education has its seat here, you see;” and he pointed to a door having the words, “Herr Nordstrom, Professor of Languages,” painted on it.

As they went up the last flight of stairs the click of billiard-balls became audible, and men’s voices talking and laughing.

Alfred led Mary into a little anteroom, and left her to wait there with a beating heart and pale but resolute face. Presently a man's step was heard, and a moment after Loxdale himself entered.

He was a tall, thin, fair-complexioned man, very erect, and had still that military air which only serves to accentuate a disreputable appearance. Once he had been a really handsome and distinguished-looking man; but the angularity of face and form, the sallow skin with its innumerable fine lines and wrinkles, the thin faded hair and bony white hands, all told of ill health and dissipation. But his whole appearance and expression told more plainly still of ill morals. Captain Loxdale's large blue eyes so repelled you by their sinister expression that you forgot to notice they were handsome in shape and colour. Though the eyebrows were somewhat raised, and the eyelids somewhat drooping, you saw at once the deception

of this would-be languor ; for, underneath, the eyes themselves were wide awake, hard, bold, brilliant, and defiant. His moustache was pointed and waxed, as if on purpose to show his clear-cut mouth and white even teeth. Time and trouble had not effaced his fixed Mephistophelian smile, nor dimmed those steel-blue eyes.

His attire harmonized very well with himself. Clothes which had once been of good cut and material appeared not only very shabby now, but to have been originally intended for some other man. The coat was very much buttoned up in front, as if to hide some deficiencies in linen. No one could ever suppose much clear-starching was done in such a house as that. He had patent leather boots, and fawn-coloured gaiters worn to hide the more obvious breaks in the patent leather. On one of the gaiters wine or tobacco-juice had left its mark. In one hand he held a billiard-cue, in the other

a lighted cigarette ; and, taken altogether, he was the very personification of an utterly collapsed dandy still striving to put the best foot forward.

To the intense surprise which he really felt at Mary's unlooked-for arrival he added the affectation of surprise. Taking a step backwards, he threw his hands out with a flourish of the cue and cigarette, and, with chin depressed and eyebrows much elevated, surveyed her with a smile half triumphant, half quizzical.

"In the name of all that's sacred and profane, what brings *you* here?" he exclaimed.

"I have come to see you," Mary replied.

"Thanks awfully! I'm sure I feel most amazingly flattered," he drawled. "But, as we've not been on visiting terms for some years, and our last meeting was not characterized by that delightful unanimity which might have been desired, I fail to understand this

sudden change of front, and must beg to be enlightened."

"I came here to see whether it is not possible for us to make friends," Mary said.

Loxdale pushed the door to with his heel, and advanced to the small table which occupied nearly all the available space. Leaning against this rather rickety piece of furniture in a lounging attitude, he fixed his keen eyes with a mesmeric glance on Mary's face.

"No, no, madame," he said, after a pause, "this won't do; no fencing with me, if you please. You've got some motive for this sudden desire for amity, peace, and goodwill."

"Certainly I have," Mary answered steadily. "If you are willing to have me back, I am willing to return."

"May I venture to inquire why you have so completely changed all your views within the space of a few months. It appears to

have been a very unnecessary expenditure of money, time, and trouble to come all this way to escape me, and then to surrender of your own accord. Am I to suppose all this is only a piece of that charming coquetry which is believed to have such a subduing effect upon the sterner sex?" he asked ironically.

"No," said Mary. "I agree with you that it was a very unnecessary expenditure; I should have been wiser to remain where I was."

"Pray where have you been?" he asked.

"Since I came to America? In British Columbia, at a place called Swanneck, east of the Cascades."

"The deuce you were! and why didn't you stay there?"

"Because I preferred to leave it." Mary paused; then added, "When I said I should have done better to remain where I was, of course I meant in England."

“Exactly,” he answered. “You would have done better to remain in England, you think. Now, may I ask why you are dissatisfied with America? and why your dissatisfaction should take the form of trying to patch up a peace with me?”

“Yes; I will tell you,” Mary replied. “It was supposed in Swanneck that I was an unmarried woman. I went there as Miss Ford, and as Miss Ford I received an offer of marriage.”

“Ah-h-h!” murmured Loxdale, triumphantly. “I thought we should get down to the truth by degrees. Patience, patience, and shuffle the cards! So there was a lover?”

For the first time since his entrance the blood rose in Mary’s colourless face, and she pressed her hands tightly together.

“Would it be any harm,” Loxdale went on in his bantering tone, “to ask who the gentleman might be? Harmless curiosity,

you know, and that sort of thing; no indelicate intrusion into affairs which don't concern me."

"If it had not concerned you I should not be here," she answered composedly. "As it is not fair to a man that his wife should receive offers unknown to him from a man who offered himself in all good faith, I determined to end the Miss Ford pretence. I will no longer occupy an equivocal position to please any one. If you think it is possible for us to live in peace, well and good. If not, I think you'll believe me when I say I shall be just as content to return to my grandfather and go my own way."

She rose, as if she had offered her ultimatum; but Loxdale, touching her shoulder lightly, made her resume her seat.

"Don't go yet," he said smoothly. "It's so refreshing, you know, to converse together after such long absence; so delightful for relations to hold 'sweet counsel' after such

a separation. ‘And doth not a meeting like this make amends?’ etcetera. This gentleman lover, this *cavalier servente*, now, who might he be?”

“He belongs to a respectable English family, and he lives in Swanneck.”

“Lives in Swanneck, does he? Well, I should say he has a nice secluded billet. I’ll be hanged if ever I heard of the place. And there’s been a lovers’ quarrel, and you’ve come to me to spite him; isn’t that it?”

“There has been no quarrel with any one; nor do I wish to spite any one,” she answered coldly. Loxdale’s fixed gaze was not pleasant, and she lowered her eyes before his insolent stare.

“Look at me,” he said presently, in authoritative tones. “Don’t you know me quite well enough to be very sure I’ll have the truth out of you, whatever it may be?”

“Have I ever told you a lie?” Mary asked.

“No, I can’t say you ever did,” he answered dryly. “But what I want to know is this, what connection is there between this man and your coming here?”

“I think I have told you already.”

“You’ve told me a man made you an offer of marriage, thinking you were a single woman; and if he did, what of that? You can’t accept him, and there’s an end on’t.”

“Not quite an end,” she said in a low, steady voice. “Suppose he would not believe I could not accept him. Suppose that, sooner than enlighten him, I left the place, and that he followed me. Suppose that, when at length I did enlighten him, he was so disgusted, and I so ashamed and so abased by the whole affair, that I resolved to hide no longer. I was not aware you were here. In fact, I was quite amazed

when Alfred Gray told me, as I was going to advertise for you."

Loxdale broke into a dry affectation of immoderate laughter.

"Going to advertise!" he repeated derisively. "A broken-hearted wife implores her beloved husband to return to her affectionate arms. No questions asked on either side; mutual confidence, regard, and esteem, and all expenses paid. What the devil do you take me for—a fool? As if a married woman can carry on an intrigue successfully without having a husband somewhere within call! Make it worth my while to look the other way, and I'll not interfere; I promise you. Nor will I be too hard as to terms. Times are bad."

Mary was sitting a little bent forward, her hands loosely clasped on her knee, her head slightly thrown backward in the effort of talking with one not on a level with herself, but speaking from a much greater height.

She knew the man far too well to utter any indignant protest against his outrageous speech, but she raised her eyes and looked into his with a cold and searching glance.

"If I remember aright," she said icily, "it is not the first time you have proposed to play the part of complaisant husband."

He turned his eyes away from hers, and laughed again.

"If I did," he said, "it was in the days when you were young and good-looking enough to be admired, and I was so devilish hard up I was not squeamish as to how I raised the wind; though, Heaven knows, I never was so completely cleaned out as at the present moment," he added, with a sigh, and a touch of sadness that might have really arisen from his deplorable circumstances, or might only be intended to wake pity for them.

"Women are not like wine," he continued; "they don't improve by maturing. No one

would suppose now you had ever been the pretty girl you were when I first met you. A good deal of guilt has been worn off the gingerbread since then, and yet it's only some nine years ago. We don't either of us look as if we could give a very satisfactory answer to the question, 'Is life worth living?' eh, madame?"

"We do not indeed. But there might be some new leaves left in the book yet, if we could only try to fill them with a better record," Mary said gently.

"Do you really mean to tell me you *wish* to live with me again?" The savage glance of defiance that accompanied his words would not have been an inducement to most women; certainly it was not one to Mary.

"If you ask what my own wishes and feelings are, I must candidly admit I do *not* wish to live with you again. But if it is my duty—as it seems to be—I don't want to shirk it any longer," she said.

Loxdale looked at her with momentary admiration. "You had always a wonderful turn of speed, Mary," he said, "and no end of staying power, if you would only have submitted to the training; but you always had so many confounded opinions of your own."

"No," she said firmly, "only one, and that I hope to keep always: the opinion that *every one* cannot be 'squared' because some can. I always told you that was the great mistake you made."

"Always told me!" he repeated angrily. "No doubt you'd be as ready as ever to tell me things I shouldn't be very ready to listen to. You were not indifferent to this man?"

The irrelevant conclusion was somewhat startling.

"No, I was not indifferent," she said, looking up. "I have no wish to deceive you. Had I been altogether indifferent the

circumstance would not have troubled me so much."

"You're fond of him."

"I should be if I were free."

"Pshaw! no beating about the bush," he cried, with an angry oath; "you *are* fond of him."

"I need not be fond of any one unless I choose. My heart at least is under my own control," she answered haughtily, as she noted his evil smile.

He was full of malice, mockery, and jealousy, yet watchful to try and turn the situation to his own advantage.

"Where is this man?"

"He was here yesterday."

"I didn't ask where he was yesterday. Where is he to-day?"

"At the —— Hotel, I believe, unless he has started for home."

"And his name? Come," he said, as she hesitated, impatiently rapping the cue on the table, "name, name, name."

"I suppose you have a right to know," she said. "His name is Wrayburn."

"Well," said Loxdale, taking out a dirty little note-book and scribbling down the name and address. "I think I'd just better see this Mr. Wrayburn."

"And I think you had better not," she said decidedly.

"Shut up," he answered rudely. "As if I don't know what I'm doing. "I'll have money from one or other of you, if not from both. How's a fellah to live, I should like to know? Perhaps the luck will turn now I've seen you. I used to think you brought luck sometimes, but nothing is as it used to be; the old plans don't seem to work somehow."

"Jasper," Mary said, almost in a tone of kindness, "if you will only make one real effort to live decently, and try to do better, I will share everything I have, and do the best I can for you in everything."

"Everything you have!" he cried contemptuously. "Why, what have you? What new vein of fortune have you struck that you're willing to go shares in? That old dotard is living yet; and even if he were dead, I don't expect there'd be such an extravagant personalty that you could afford to offer shares in it. Share everything you have, indeed!"

"I can always make a moderate income by teaching," she answered calmly.

"Oh, the devil take your confounded moderation and respectability. I can't do with 'em—never could."

"Then you won't have me?" she said, rising as she spoke.

He looked at her with a wicked smile, a smile that might have belonged to the face of a fallen angel, so malignant, sneering, and vindictive was it. It was pleasure to him to torture her by making her wait for his decision. He enjoyed her suspense, knowing

she felt her whole future hanging in the balance. The compressed lips, the tension of her hand resting on the back of a chair, the sickly pallor in her cheek, the anxiety in her eyes which she tried vainly to hide, were all duly observed by him. He flicked the ash off his cigarette ; stooped down to button his boot, though that especial button was long missing, then raised himself up and stroked his moustache with a serious, considering air.

“ Well, no—o—o, I think not,” he said at last, very slowly and deliberately ; “ I’m afraid it would not work any better than formerly ; and then your *cher ami* might only complicate matters. So I must deny myself the pleasure—the inestimable pleasure and privilege, and all that sort of thing. Of course, I’m deeply sensible of your affability and consideration in trying to bring about a reconciliation ; that must all be taken as read. It’s not your fault if things won’t reconcile ;

it's the fault of the things, you see. And you really are most thankful that they show this difficulty in reconciling. You're better pleased to hear me say I don't want you back than if some one had left you a fortune."

She made no reply to his caustic remarks, for his words could not be refuted. Indeed, she felt already as if a load had been lifted from her mind. Yet she knew she was not done with him; that every mocking, lightly spoken word contained a menace.

"Good-bye, then," she said, and held out her hand.

Loxdale shrugged his shoulders, and seemed in two minds about shaking hands. Finally, he gave the tips of his fingers.

"Good-bye. You are going home to dinner, I suppose, or luncheon rather," he said pointedly; "I've not won the price of my breakfast yet. I'm late—late and fashionable;" and he laughed that unpleasant laugh.

The statement, whether true or false, made Mary flush scarlet. That he should be in want, that he should beg so openly, were alike intolerable to her. She felt all the disgrace, to which he appeared quite indifferent.

“Excuse me ; I did not think,” she said hurriedly ; and, taking out her purse, she put most of its contents into his ready hand.

“A lot of four bits,” he remarked contemptuously. “Ta-ta ; take care of yourself.”

He held the door open for her to pass out, and accompanied her to the head of the stairs. There he paused, and laid his hand impressively on her arm.

“No, no, Mary,” he said, in quite an altered tone, “we have both been mistaken. We have been too long apart, and our lives have been too different, to come together again and live in peace. I’m a poor broken-down wretch, without friends, or prospects,

or hopes of any kind. I've never had a day's luck since I went in for Beverly's stable, and that was in the second year of our marriage. Do you remember that colt Hesperus, how he let us all in? I thought to make a pot of money out of that brute; but it was a dead swindle, and I've not done a stroke of anything good since—'pon my word I've not. And I got among a set who dragged me down inch by inch until I was the worst of the lot. It would be too great a sacrifice, Mary; I couldn't accept it from you. And I shan't stand long in your way either. My lungs are gone to the deuce, and there's something wrong with my heart. I'm on my last legs, and you don't need to wait. A hundred a year would keep me quite comfortably now, and I'd never trouble you so long as it was paid regularly. A divorce is not an expensive or a difficult thing to get in this country; and it's only fair to let you make some sort of provision

for yourself while you're anyway young and attractive. You might never have another chance."

Mary had listened to him with her face averted. When he ceased, she looked up with glittering eyes.

"Do you really think I would make such a bargain, even if I could?" she asked, in a tone so low that he had to bend his head to catch her words. "That you should not set a very high value upon me is not wonderful; but that you should imagine I could value myself at a hundred a year 'paid regularly'—that is too amusing. To suppose that I would sell myself! You must be insane to make such a proposal. I advise you not to make it to any one else."

"We'll see about that," he answered laughingly; "every one has not such old-fashioned notions as yourself. Why, scores of the most highly connected people are divorced and remarried, and aren't a whit the worse."

“I tell you,” Mary said, with suppressed passion, “every man has not his price, though you persist in believing he has. You shall have your hundred, Captain Loxdale, but not by such disgraceful means.”

He watched her as she turned away and went downstairs.

“Oh yes,” he said to himself, nodding his head, “you could always walk like an empress. You have a stately step, and carry your head high, madame, but you shall lie in the dust yet, and shall know a blacker day than any of the black days you’ve ever known. Never yet have I been able to master her thoroughly. But I’ll never rest until I’ve humbled her so that she’ll not rise again. Damn the woman, how I hate her!”

If the unfortunate man had said, “How I love her!” he would have been still nearer the mark. He and Mary were so opposite in every way, that they could not even meet without clashing. Yet the thought that

most tormented him through all his degradation was that he still loved Mary, while all his vanity and self-sufficiency could not conceal from him the fact that her love for him had been but the temporary delirium of an infatuated girl. If she had ever loved him, the feeling was so cold and dead that she could barely disguise by outward civility her entire scorn and loathing of him.

There was a dazed feeling over Mary as she went down. So preoccupied was she that she never remembered Alfred Gray was waiting for her until she almost ran against him. He was leaning against the wall near a grimy window, reading a newspaper. He put it away as she reached him, and they went down the rest of the stairs side by side.

"You are ill," he said, looking at her inquiringly.

"No ; only excited and tired. I should like to go home."

"I will take you home at once."

It was not until they were on the steamer crossing to Oakland that she spoke.

“ I have made you waste a whole morning over me and my wretched affairs, Alfred.”

“ Don’t speak of that,” he answered kindly. “ Will you tell me what decision he has arrived at ? ”

“ He does not want me back,” she said.

“ Thank Heaven for that, at least ! ” said he fervently ; “ but that’s rather odd, after all the fuss he has been making.”

“ He has other schemes in his head,” she answered bitterly. “ He will show his hand presently.”

“ That is rather like one of his own expressions, isn’t it, Mary ? ”

“ It is, I admit ; but you know what I mean. I have promised to pay him a hundred a year, Alfred.”

“ Where are you to get it from ? ” he asked in surprise.

“ I don’t know. I shall have to work hard.”

“And this is all you have gained by your visit.”

At his tone of reproach, Mary winced slightly.

“I am not sorry I went,” she said; “nor do I regret the promise. In fact, even if he had not asked for an income, I think I should have suggested helping him in some way. If you could see him—but of course you have seen him. Grandfather must have been mistaken in saying he looked much the same, or else he must have had a very hard time since he came here. He is not forty yet, but he looks any age, and so ill and dilapidated. It went to my heart to see him in such poverty. Yet when he speaks he says such things, and has such an odious way of saying them, that I feel as if I could kill him. God help us both! there are not surely a more miserable pair beneath the sun.”

Alfred made no reply, for she was gazing

across the bay with dim, dreamy eyes, and he knew she would not hear him. When they reached home, he gave her into his wife's charge again.

"Don't worry her with questions just now, Fanny," he said in an aside. "Unless she is properly looked after and left in peace, I am sure she will have some serious illness. I never noticed until to-day how frail and delicate she looks."

"Only tell me one thing, Alfred—is she going back?"

"No, she is not. When she offers to return, he will not have her."

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the kind-hearted little woman. "My poor dear ridiculous old Mary!"





CHAPTER XIV.

AS soon as she felt able, Mary began to make preparations for returning to England. The nervous tension she had borne so long, and the strain she had put upon herself to make the forced visit to Loxdale, had ended in a sort of low fever. No longer harassed by perplexing thoughts and knotty questions, she suddenly had time to realize how severely this excitement had taxed her physical powers. But with the old strength of will she baffled the feverish weakness and throbbing headaches, which caused her to be "sore let and hindered" in her packing up.

Fanny would fain have persuaded her to remain with them, at least until the winter was over.

"Fancy what the Atlantic will be like," she urged.

"I am a good sailor, and do not mind rough weather in the least," replied Mary, impatient only to shake the dust of America off her feet.

So, against all remonstrance, she set out alone upon her return journey. She had written to her grandfather to dissuade him from meeting her at Liverpool. Money was such a scant commodity in the Vanburgh household, that it behoved them to save even a railway fare that was not strictly necessary. Thus Mr. Vanburgh had to content himself with going to Longbridge railway station ever so much too soon. When he had fatigued himself by walking up and down, in a quietly fussy state of mind, he sat down near the refreshment-room door. The

sickly, sweet, winy odour pertaining to all such places was just becoming disagreeable to him, when the express came sweeping in, and a few moments later he was embracing Mary.

After a year's absence she was home again. Alas! such home-comings are very mournful. The changes are all in ourselves. Places and people appear to have stood serenely still as we left them. We only have been suffering, sorrowing, battling, living. More like visitant spirits are we than ordinary human beings, coming to be fed and housed, and ready to be harnessed to the old routine.

There were no visible changes in the commonplace, pretty town, with its swept-up, neat, Sunday-like look; nor in the little old house and garden. Mary thought of the bitter tears she had shed, remembering them when she was far away in lonely Swanneck. After supper she went down

into the dark garden, and sauntered among the leafless apple-trees. But the old feelings could not all at once be recalled. She was overcome by a sense of prosy littleness in everything after the ineffable grandeur of the wild stretching mountains and solemn pine woods of Swanneck. These garden walls enclosed a very insignificant patch of ground. Every boundary seemed narrowed, and all things had conspired to put on a more paltry look since she went away.

"I shall soon get used to it again," she said to herself, and went indoors with a sigh.

Again and again has it been declared, as if it were some special merit in the country, that there is no place like England for "taking the nonsense out of you." If it can be proved that to be rid of all "nonsense" is essentially a benefit, then all praise be to England! Certainly nowhere does the necessity to rise up and "labour not for the

meat that perisheth " more plainly manifest itself.

Before Mary had been many days at home, she was caught in the cog-wheels of imperious social pressure. That hundred a year to Loxdale lay heavy upon her mind. It must be earned, but how? where?

"Grandfather," she said, as they sat together at breakfast, "I should have to work like a galley-slave to earn that much money here. I should like to go to London."

"To London!" Mr. Vanburgh exclaimed. "After all you suffered there, I should have thought it was the last place you would care to return to."

"Where have I not suffered?" she said, as if to herself. "There is a larger field there; that is all I was thinking of. I might get concert engagements as well as pupils, or a post as organist to some church or chapel. Think how many there are. I

am not afraid of my ability, if I could once get a fair start."

"A fair start! Mary, Mary!"

The choked sound of his voice made her look up suddenly from the piece of toast she was buttering.

Mr. Vanburgh rose from his chair, an angry glow in his usually gentle eyes, a flush on his handsome old face.

"I have borne much, and am willing to bear much," he said, with all the dignity of restrained anger, "but this I will not bear."

"Dear grandfather," Mary exclaimed, in distress, "why are you so vexed?"

"I am poor, very poor," he went on hastily, "but my poverty shall not be made my disgrace. Hitherto we have always managed to keep our troubles to ourselves. We did not take the whole world into our confidence, as we shrank smaller and smaller, unjust demands eating us up. I did not

object to your giving music-lessons to private pupils, or helping in any quiet, moderate way open to a gentlewoman. But that you should join the ranks of vulgarized women and make your bread publicly—this I'm not poor enough yet, or meek enough, to endure."

"But all public performers are not vulgarized, grandfather. That is a very sweeping assertion. They are as good as myself, and many of them better," said Mary.

"I say," repeated the old man, "any woman, be she princess or peasant, who lives by popular favour is vulgarized. Any clown can cheer or hiss her performance as he chooses. He has paid his money, and can tear her to tatters if he pleases."

"It is not for myself," Mary answered, in expostulation. "What can it matter whose ranks I join, or how I live, so long as I can make an honest living?"

"You can do that here, and lead at the

same time the retired, domestic, womanly life suited to you."

"Emancipated woman" was a creature unknown to Mr. Vanburgh. He had heard of her as he had heard of the Siamese Twins, or the Two-headed Nightingale, or any other monstrosity. But his old-fashioned views did not include even the self-reliant working woman, who is the nineteenth-century's own special darling.

Without any yearnings for "emancipation," Mary yet allowed a slightly derisive smile to reward his antiquated propriety.

"Can I earn a hundred a year here?—that is the question," she said rather tartly.

"Do not distress yourself," Mr. Vanburgh replied, with a wave of the hand; "he shall be paid, never fear."

"But since I made the promise, on my own head be the injury," said Mary. "Besides, you can't blame me for desiring some

little independence of my own. It would be hard to hand over every penny I earned straight to him."

Mr. Vanburgh turned upon her with a sharpness she had never known.

"I must say trying deliberately to go back into slavery was a strange way of seeking independence, Mary," he said incisively. "And since you have provoked me into saying it, I may as well tell you that nothing you ever did caused me so much vexation as your going to Loxdale. In fact, your whole behaviour in America has been so at variance with all your previous behaviour here, that I'm quite at a loss to understand it. Your mind seems to have gone astray in some way that I can't fathom."

"It is right that you should reprove my conduct if you think it needs reproof; and, of course, I know every one must condemn me," she returned wearily. "I've tried to do my duty according to my lights, but I

don't expect other people to appreciate my motives, or to see things as I do."

Her sad indifference touched the old man more than the most energetic defence could.

"Let it pass," he said; "say no more about it. But allow me to judge in this other matter. I cannot allow you to place yourself in a position for which you are wholly unfitted by nature and training."

"I have had to learn and unlearn a good many things," she answered, "and it is quite immaterial to me whether I play in public or private. All I want is enough money to keep me from being a burden upon others."

"Oh, Mary," he said, with emotion, "what other burden have I? They are all dead and gone. What other interest or care beyond yourself have I left in the world? Child, when I am gone be as independent as you please; but while I live let me at least feel I have one being still remaining to

think of and provide for. Don't convert me into a piece of aged lumber."

"Grandfather, I know I owe obedience to you for all your care of me since I was quite a child ; but must obedience necessarily restrict me to Longbridge ?"

"This house is the only shelter of my old age. It's not much, perhaps, but, such as it is, it's my own, and I shall not lightly give it up. But I can't afford to keep up two houses, Mary, one here and one in London."

"I had not thought of such a thing."

"Well, you could not live alone."

"Then, since you so desire it, I must remain here, and do the best I can."

The prospect did not please her, for she was not attuned to the placid monotony of Longbridge. With her American experience so freshly in mind, she would gladly have sought a more exciting centre of activity, wherein to lose somewhat of her

super-self-consciousness. It was irritating, too, to feel that she could do nothing of her own volition without giving offence; while she yet was bound to render gratitude for that which deprived her of any initiative.

As for Mr. Vanburgh, the passing years had accustomed him to a poverty in which solaces had grown up around him. Although she had been his heaviest trouble, Mary herself had also been his greatest solace. All the happiness he desired was to pass his remaining years in the quiet seclusion of his own home, with Mary beside him. To attain this object he was willing to retrench still more where already there was little room for retrenchment. By insisting on paying the money promised to Loxdale, he could succeed in keeping Mary in helpless proximity.

When she lived in Longbridge before, she had felt it was merely a tentative arrange-

ment until Loxdale's imprisonment should be ended. That some family convulsion would then take place had always been expected. That convulsion had occurred, with results rather different from those anticipated. With mind and heart alike unsettled, she was now to settle down to vegetate for an indefinite period.

About this time she was fond of reading the Psalms and "In Memoriam." In both the low key, the profound shade, and massive melancholy appealed to her heart, and awoke there only too many answering chords.

As she took up, one by one, her old pupils and got new ones, and passed to and fro on her daily round of duty, the yellow wintry fog hung over the Longbridge streets. The chilly rain dripped from dead gaunt trees. She trod the sticky, soapy pavements with patient puritan face, but with a heart whose bitterness was never excelled even by the

preacher himself when he took for his text, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

She was only doing what we all do when we lift the veil and try to look at the future. We always see things on far too wide and vast a scale. It is wise and very expedient to take small, short views of life. Instead of this, we say, "Given the average length of days, our present income, friends, and general surroundings, none of the outer circles from the wave of some stirring event are likely to reach us within the next ten or even twenty years. As it was yesterday and the day before, so will it be to-morrow and the day after. What a weariness is life!"

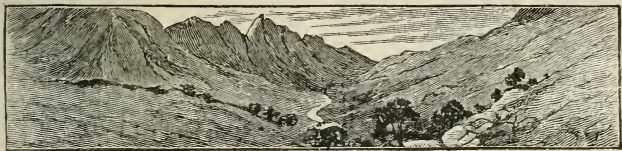
Yet all the time on the other side of the world the sun is shining; on the other side of the hedge the fruit is ripening; on the other side of the wall a fire is blazing. I am here, cold and ragged and hungry. I have taken a draught from the brook for

my supper; I have crept into an angle of the wall out of the keen wind; and now I shall lie down under the stars, with mother-earth for my pillow. Suddenly a door in the wall opens; a woman's figure stands illumined by a ruddy glow of firelight. She bids me enter and share the warmth and a portion of her goodman's supper. Thus, all at once, I am on the other side of the wall.

How crude are those mediæval pictures! A crucified Christ in the centre; lilies blooming at the foot of the cross; pious tonsured and sandalled monks kneeling around; bits of the sky broken overhead, and, in the jagged spaces, cherubic heads smiling out, reminding one of chickens breaking through their shells. Good, faithful, simple-hearted painters! Would that we who laugh at your rough *technique* and realistic ideas could as readily break bits in our sky and catch celestial glimpses!

For already a stone had dropped. Already, unknown to her, the circles from that central disturbance were widening and rippling towards Mary.





CHAPTER XV.

WRAYBURN had not left San Francisco. He had waited to hear from Mrs. Gray of Mary's departure and subsequent arrival in England. The thought of returning to snow-clad Swanneck, to be haunted by one face and one voice throughout the long winter, was not acceptable to him. Thus, from first one reason and then another, week rolled into week and yet he lingered, as if unwilling to place himself beyond the chance of even hearing of her. But he did not stay in the city. Hotel life suited neither his tastes nor his pocket; so he removed himself to the sea, within an hour's journey

by rail from the city, and there he made his winter quarters. During this period he saw a good deal of the Grays, who were friendly and hospitable. Fanny loved confidences, and would have liked nothing better than the interesting occupation of consoling a hapless lover. But this lover could not be petted or consoled, for the good reason that he could not be beguiled into the subject of his love-affairs. This obstinate silence on his part awakened a lively resentment in Fanny.

“I never saw such a man,” she would say. “A lover indeed! Any one would think he had been perfectly successful. He does not seem in the least put out.”

“Would you have him hang his head, refuse his food, and take to writing rhymes?” Alfred said. “He’s not a boy, and not wholly destitute of sense.”

Mary had been gone two or three months, when Wrayburn came in rather excitedly one morning, and found Fanny alone.

"I want you to read something," he said, almost before she had time to greet him. As he spoke he unfolded a copy of that day's issue of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Glancing rapidly down one column, he found what he wanted, and handed the paper to her.

"Read that," he said briefly.

What he pointed to was a notice among the deaths: "At Sacramento, in his 39th year, Jasper Petrie Loxdale, only son of the late Wallace Petrie Loxdale, of Fortfield, Yorks, England."

Fanny's eyes dilated with amazement as she read the lines. She drew a long breath, and looked up at Wrayburn.

"Oh, can it be really, *really* true?" she exclaimed in mingled hope and doubt, and clasping her hands together. "It must be true; of course it is."

"Might it not be some one of the same name?" he said.

“That was his own name, and his father’s name, and the name of their place,” she answered emphatically. “Oh, it could not possibly be any one else. There couldn’t be two sets of people with just the same names. He is dead !”

“But the date of his death is not given ; nor any more definite address than Sacramento,” said Wrayburn. “If you notice, most of the others go into great detail. They give not only the street and the number of his house, but what the man actually dies of, and where he’s to be buried.”

“But he had no friends,” Fanny said eagerly. “No one would trouble themselves much about him.”

“Who has put this notice in, then ?”

“Perhaps the people of the house where he lived.”

“What would he be doing in Sacramento ?”

“Anything — or nothing. He was a gipsy.”

“Has Mr. Gray seen anything of him lately?”

“No. He has only once seen him since Mary left, and then he met him in the street.”

Wrayburn stroked his moustache and considered a while, with his eyes still fixed on those fascinating words, as if they could give him counsel or illumination.

“This Fortfield,” he said presently, “does it belong to his family? would they know anything about him there, do you think?”

“Oh dear, no,” Fanny replied; “Fortfield is only the name of a district. They lived there once, but his father died years ago, and whatever property they had was sold. There is no one there belonging to him; of that I’m quite positive.”

“Well, I’m going down to Sacramento to sift things out, and make sure that he is

dead. I need not ask that you will say nothing about this to any one until I'm perfectly satisfied it's all right."

"Oh, certainly not," Fanny said, smiling at him with great intelligence. But, though he nodded his head and smiled in return, even then he would not be betrayed into bringing Mary's name forward.

To go in search of a dead man when you never knew the man, nor have any knowledge of the date of his death, nor where or with whom he died, nor who had any dealings with him beforehand, is rather a thankless task. But this was the task Wrayburn set out upon when he reached Sacramento.

"Somebody must have buried him—that's clear. Let's try the undertakers first," he said to himself.

After several failures, the scent began to grow warmer.

"I believe I buried a man of that name

a short time back," said an affable undertaker whom he had unearthed. Producing his order-book, this funereal personage read out the date and address, and the few simple requisites that he had furnished.

"It was a case of D.T.," he said. "Thar war tue of them—came here to play a match at billiards. Didn't come off. He took a spurt at drinkin', and finished off within the week. The bar-tender whar they stayed's a friend of mine. Can walk up street and introduce you if you care. He can tell you more'n I can."

Wrayburn accepted the offer, and was accordingly introduced to the bar-tender.

"What war they like?" he said, in answer to Wrayburn's question. "Well, much of a muchness. Long lanky pair. I dar' say they'd bin toney once; rather played-out lookin' now. He took sick night he came here. Inclined to be a bit troublesome, you understand; huntin' the devils round the

room with a razor ; then all for pitchin' himself out o' window to get quit of them, and yellin' like the mischief. They fetched a doctor, and he quieted him some ; but he all kinder dropped into a heap, and you'd swear he'd kicked the bucket long before he had."

"Was he a tall, slight-built, fair-complexioned man, with a slight scar across the cheek-bone?" said Wrayburn, referring to the notes Fanny had pencilled down for his guidance.

"He was tall and slightish, and fair-haired, what there was of it. But I didn't remark any scar."

"Possibly it was only slight. It was a cut from a diamond-ring, or something of that kind. What was his friend like?"

"Dark, evil-looking chap ; but not a bad sort, and very attentive to the other."

As the bar-tender's spare moments were of short duration, Wrayburn got the doctor's

address and went on to him. This doctor appeared either to have established himself in an unfortunately healthy neighbourhood, or to have fallen out with Fortune, who was revenging herself upon him most grievously ; for, to judge by his own appearance and that of his establishment, the only patients he ever got were *in extremis* cases like Loxdale's.

He quite brightened up when Wrayburn entered, but the brightness dulled perceptibly when he found his professional services were not required. However, he was an amiable man, and discursive, and gave much additional information regarding the appearance of both men, the last illness of the one, and subsequent behaviour of the other.

"Pierce was the friend's name," said the doctor. "He was an American, I believe—at least, he said so. He gave me to understand that they were professional billiard-players, taking a tour through the States. But, between you and me and the lamp-post, though

he talked big, I believe he and his friend were just a couple of poor devils living by their wits; making believe to challenge each other to matches that weren't financed or organized by any one. They'd had a run of luck somewhere before they came here, for they were flush of money. And Pierce was a good player, certainly—knew a neat thing or two. Of the other I can't speak; he was pretty well collapsed when he came."

"Where did Pierce go when he left here?"

"Haven't the least idea. He said he would take Loxdale's effects to his friends. I don't know if he did."

"Well, it's more than a month ago, you say. He has not turned up yet. What effects were there?"

"Oh, just a few clothes and oddments of that sort. There were a lot of papers and things in a small black valise. Pierce took

them out, and packed it with the other things, and took it away with him."

"What became of the papers?"

"We burned them, he and I."

"What were they? Letters?"

"Letters, bills, receipts, bank-books, betting-books, and so forth. The letters seemed to be chiefly from a man named Stoddart, evidently a trainer, or something of that sort. Pierce told me his friend had been unfortunate, and had served a term of imprisonment in his own country, and the papers had been in this Stoddart's charge. There had been a number of money transactions between them."

"Could you give me Stoddart's address?"

"He's dead, I believe."

"Oh, that's unfortunate! Well, do you remember any other names among his correspondents?"

"Let me see. There were a lot from a man named Clay—fine bellicose fellow;

regular head-smashing through the penny post. His opinion of Loxdale was not just A 1. Indeed, he had rather a plethora of outspoken friends. Another, named Vanburgh, let him have it pretty straight too, and no mistake; and another named Isaacson, a money-lender; and another named Trevor-Moreton, or some such double-barrelled name; and——”

“Well,” said Wrayburn, interrupting his fluent friend, “it seems to be the same man, the man I’m trying to trace. But, you understand, I never saw him, nor even a photograph of him; for, unfortunately, he was not so beloved by his friends that any of them thought it worth while to preserve his photograph. If you had something very important—an estate, for instance—depending upon the proofs of this man’s death, would you feel satisfied with such proofs as you have given me?”

“You want a man named Loxdale, a

mauvais sujet, an ex-convict, or something like it, a man living by his wits, in bad health, in bad company, sure to come to a bad end—and here you have him,” said the doctor, checking off each point of resemblance on his finger-tips. “His appearance tallies exactly with the written description you have of him, and his papers leave no shadow of a doubt that it’s the same man. ’Pon my word, I don’t see what further proofs you’re likely to get hold of, or to need. Is it a law-suit?”

“Not exactly, but even more important.”

“You seem rather hard to convince.”

“So would you if you were in my place.”

When Wrayburn got back to San Francisco, he hastened to lay the results of his journey before the Grays.

“Now, what do you think of it all?” he said. “Is the man dead or not?”

“Dead,” Alfred replied; “clearly and evidently dead. He was in wretchedly bad

health, and tried to trade upon it, telling me he was in a galloping consumption. I did not believe him, for he appeared to get no worse ; but he may have been really worse than I thought. There's no doubt his constitution was completely undermined, and a week's hard drinking would very probably throw him off his perch altogether."

"Whatever money there was between them, this Pierce has pocketed. We have heard the last of him and the black valise, I expect," said Wrayburn.

"Some scoundrel like himself—'birds of a feather,' " Alfred remarked.

"Well, I can do no more at present," Wrayburn said, "until we see if any one turns up to claim the first instalment of that money. When is it due?"

"It's due now," Alfred replied. "What a mad idea that was of hers!"

"Mad or not, few women have either her courage or her magnanimity," said the other.

"But it was so absolutely unnecessary. He would never have found her out if she had not thrown off all disguise and gone to him."

"The more praise to her for boldly attacking what she at least conceived to be her duty, regardless of consequences."

"You'll not go back to Swanneck now, will you?" Fanny asked, rather anxiously.

"Not at present; it's not likely," he answered, with a reassuring smile. "But I'm not in any hurry to go to England. The worst man has a right to some show of respect, once he's dead."

From this speech Fanny inferred that, if there could be no mourning for Loxdale, there could be a period of decent silence, and Wrayburn plainly intended to impose this restraint upon himself.

"The funeral baked meats will not coldly furnish forth *your* marriage-table," she said, laughing maliciously.

"I am no admirer of second marriages, under any circumstances," he answered coolly; "and, if I could choose, I should certainly prefer an unmarried woman for my wife. But, as that is already decided for me, I must take things as they are, not as I should like them to be."

When Wrayburn was gone, the husband and wife began to discuss him.

"Who would have thought his chance would have come so soon?" Alfred said. "Poor Loxdale!"

"Oh, I'm quite disgusted with men!" pouted Fanny. "Now I suppose every one will begin to pity that odious wretch, and call him 'Poor Loxdale!' I wish people wouldn't be so stupid. That's the most vexatious man in the world. I never met such an unsatisfactory, dawdling creature."

"Do you mean Wrayburn?"

"Yes, I do. Any other man would fly to Mary the moment he knew she was free."

"Very absurd if he did."

"Why would it be absurd?"

"Such indecent haste."

"Isn't it natural to suppose that if he really loved her he would wish to give her the support of his presence and sympathy? He doesn't half love her."

"I believe his love for her amounts to a passion."

"Oh, nonsense, Alfred! Passion! It's a funny kind of passion. It's not at all the sort of passion I should care to see in any one professing to be fond of me. But the whole man was a regular disappointment. I did think it really must be quite a phenomenal man who could exert such an influence over Mary. And there was a suggestion of mysticism or quietism, or some *ism* in her description of him that promised the most refreshing originality. But when I saw him, he was quite ordinary and commonplace, and I felt very much crushed."

“He’s an original for all that,” said Alfred. “There’s something about him, I don’t know what it is, but you meet with the same thing in books occasionally. They’re badly constructed in plot, badly grouped, and full of faults, yet there is such a power behind it all that you feel it’s the work of a genius.”

Fanny gave a little scream of protestation. “Surely,” she cried, “you are not going to enshrine him as a genius now.”

“No, I don’t say it’s genius in Wrayburn, but it’s power of some kind, and not mere cleverness. He reminds me of some powerful young animal beginning to feel its strength. The sense of weakness is gone; it could attack you, but refrains from a good disposition. The force is on his side, the artifice on ours. But you feel he is reading you through and through, and, simply by the strength of his own character, he influences you without ever trying to.”

“That faculty of his is only what phrenologists call ‘intuitive perception.’”

“Perhaps; it may be. But, more than any man I ever met of his age, he has retained the ‘dew of his youth.’ He seems to extract a great deal of enjoyment out of life through simply believing the world is a good world unless you help to make it a bad one.”

“Well, my dear, I don’t see much genius or originality in that, or in anything else about him,” said Fanny, briskly. “He has nice shoulders and nice hands, though they’re a little spoiled with a rough life. And his hair is not bad—no, his hair is decidedly decent. Beyond those three items I can see no merit in him.”

“The eye sees what it brings with it the power to see.”

“Alfred, don’t make trite quotations, my friend. They’re the sure forerunner of fogeydom and every other horror.”

"Well, I can see a good deal more in a man than you can evidently. I am never long in Wrayburn's company without feeling thoroughly dissatisfied, as if I might have done much better with myself than I have done; as if there was some failure in my private development that I am trying to rectify by outward props and stays."

"If for no other quality than that, I should take a dislike to him. I don't like to feel dissatisfied with myself. But I can't say he ever made me feel so."

"Your layer of self-conceit is much too thick for him to penetrate, my love."

"Oh, I like Mr. Wrayburn, although I abuse him; but I'm not going to fall down and worship him like you and Mary. I consider him quite common clay."

"Quite common; he never puts up to be anything more than his neighbours. Yet he's quite different. Now, if we do anything

out of the common we must first find a precedent ; then we must give a reason for doing it, and explain our attitude to every one, for fear they won't understand that our motives are good, and all that. He does not do that. He's not everlastingly offering explanations or apologies, or trying to screw himself down to some model that society inflicts upon us. And why should we do it? If he can be free, why can't we?"

"What do you mean by free?"

"Well, perhaps I only mean unconventional. We lop and prune away a very wasteful amount of ourselves in trying to reach some conventional standard of excellence that don't seem to amount to much when we've got to it. For here's a man who has idled away the best years of his life in some uncivilized back-lot, who has thrown over what we call 'our advantages.' Yet without any effort he can at once influence you, and me, and Mary; and we are bound

to acknowledge there is something in himself that gives him all the advantage."

"It's only that he's lively and clever, and can do many showy things in a way that makes you feel he could do them a great deal better if he chose. And we look on and call him a wonderful fellow, as the yokels at a fair stand and gape at the man who eats fire or swallows knives."

"But how do we get the impression that he could do things better if he chose, for he never does do them particularly well? All this verse-making and sonneteering, this song-writing and twanging of the light guitar, don't amount to much after all. Why do we fancy he has some reserve of talent that he never once shows?"

"Because," said Fanny, with great acumen, "there are many people who are always holding out a promise that they never redeem, and raising expectations they don't fulfil. Whether they underrate their own

powers, or won't take the trouble to develop them, or have too high an ideal ever to reach, I can't say; but Mr. Wrayburn is one of those people. When he was growing up, you may be sure he promised to be a very handsome man. But he hasn't grown up in the least handsome, though every now and then you think he is. He's just one of those aggravating people who perplex you, and that's why they interest you."

"Then I wish I could persuade people I had something more in me than I ever show. I know this—Wrayburn has unconsciously made me sift more corn from the chaff and do more private keel-hauling than any one I have ever known. And I've come to this conclusion, Fanny—that it's much easier to *do* good than to *be* good; but if instead of doing good people would be good, this world would be a vastly healthier place."

Poor Alfred! He was one of the well-intentioned people who seem to be "not far

from the kingdom," but, from some fatal lack of comprehension, never to get nearer. He could not see that the power he recognized in Wrayburn was a spiritual power, "a life within a life," derived from sources other than the institutions of this world, and dedicated to far different ends. He was dissatisfied with himself, but unable to supply any reasons and answers for his dissatisfaction, while the desire to be rich, and to stand well with the world, indisposed him for pushing his inner researches to too great a depth. Some safe neutral ground from which he could lay a hand on either world was what he wanted—a ground which finds favour with most of us. He could not unmask himself to the core, and interpret himself to himself as Wrayburn had done, as, here and there, a strong affirmative soul fearlessly does, counting the cost, and electing to become one of the world's unapplauded *enfants perdus*.



CHAPTER XVI.

IT was in the first week of March that Wrayburn had gone to Sacramento, but it was not until the following August that he arrived in England.

As nothing further had been heard of or from the man Pierce, and no one claimed the money Mary had forwarded to Alfred Gray for Loxdale, it was necessary to make her fully acquainted with all that had happened, and return the money.

But Wrayburn did not write until several months had elapsed. Knowing the depths of agony Mary had so lately passed through,

and the quiet sorrow which had been her daily portion for years, he could not bring himself to propose suddenly a sharp and violent change. He preferred to wait until some of "Nature's silent overgrowings" had time to spring up in her heart rather than to frustrate their growth. Better, he thought, that she should have time to look back with softened feelings upon the great tragedy of her life. Though impulsive, he was not one of those who regard Time as a thief instead of a ripener, and clutch at every joy lest it should fall to the ground or be stolen from them. He had made time in his own life for mourning and repentance, and still there would be time for hope and gladness.

So it was not until the end of August that he stood, with a heart beating like a boy's, on the threshold of Mary's home. He had written to her from California, making a formal offer of marriage as if he had never offered himself before. And Mary, with

silent thankfulness, had accepted his offer in a brief and modestly worded reply.

Her first feeling on hearing of Loxdale's death had been one of scared unbelief. It could not be true. Good people died every day, people who were loved, desired, and necessary. But those who are hateful, dreaded, and despaired of, those live—live long and heartily. Doubt gave way before evidence, and then a sense of the blessedness of freedom awoke within her. The incubus was gone. Never more need she feel that sore heart-sickness. The dead weight and pall-like gloom that had rested upon her for years were suddenly withdrawn. She was almost affrighted, like some caged creature that knows not what to make of liberty. True life and lawful love were both before her, but she would not look at either. Wrayburn had gauged her correctly when he believed she would spend much of her time at first in finding palliation for Loxdale's

past offences. She scourged her mind back to this whenever it strayed away to more pleasing thoughts. Nor did she slacken in this pious duty, as she at least regarded it, even when Wrayburn's letter and her own reply seemed to justify cheerfulness.

"Unhappiness comes so natural to me," she said to her grandfather, "that I feel as if I were trying to snatch 'a fearful joy,' or doing something wicked in letting myself be happy."

In her own mind she had arranged all the details connected with Wrayburn's visit with the accuracy of a royal procession; but at the very outset her nerve suddenly failed. Instead of receiving him, bidding him welcome, and presenting him to her grandfather, the moment the door-bell rang, she incontinently turned and fled upstairs.

Left to the guidance of his own intuitions, poor Mr. Vanburgh got as well as he could

through the predicament in which he had been so awkwardly left.

Wrayburn was not a formidable person to receive. He threw no glances round the room in search of some one other than his host. If he had come all the way from California on purpose to make Mr. Vanburgh's acquaintance, he could not have appeared more genuinely content with his society. He had a good deal to say for himself, and showed a lively interest in the little house and garden.

There was a window at either end of the room : one looking out upon a short strip of the regular villa garden—neat, formal, and small ; the other overlooked the pleasant sunny fruit and flower garden behind.

Wrayburn rose during a pause in the conversation, and went over to the latter window. " Mary has talked to me about this room, and your garden, when we were both in Swanneck," he said, in a easy offhand way.

"I scarcely thought then that some day I should be here myself. Things come about very strangely, don't they?"

"Very strangely," Mr. Vanburgh replied, in a rather helpless style; then added, "The room is somewhat sad and sombre, like the people who have lived in it. I am too old to make much change in my life now; but I hope to see a great change in my poor Mary's life, Mr. Wrayburn; less cloud and a little more sunshine."

The expression of wistful appeal in the old man's eyes touched Wrayburn even more than his words.

"She shall be happy," he said fearlessly. "I know I have the power to make her happy, and have no fear of the future."

Mr. Vanburgh pressed his hand as he stood beside him. "I will go and look for Mary," he said, and left the room.

Wrayburn immediately crossed the room to the other window. Glancing at the lilac-

bushes, laurels, and rhododendrons round about the gate, he thought of the fatal night when Loxdale had lurked behind them with intent to kill or maim his wife. As he fitted Mrs. Gray's story to its surroundings, the door softly opened and closed again.

It was Mary who had entered. She was clad just as he had always seen her, in a plain black gown with spotlessly white collar and cuffs. There was no perceptible change in her appearance, but her manner was more embarrassed than he had ever known it. Taking both her hands, he drew her forward and kissed her with a sort of frank decorum. At his touch Mary dissolved in tears ; and, leading her to a seat, he sat down beside her without speaking.

"Oh, I cannot help it!" she exclaimed, when she had regained her composure. "I feel as if I was doing something altogether wrong. If he had been good and kind and loving, what mourning there would be now !

But because he was none of these, every one is relieved — yes, relieved and thankful. People have come and almost congratulated me, as they would go to condole with other women. There are none to pity him—not one ; and my own heart is the hardest of all.”

“Probably there is not a man in the world so bad,” said Wrayburn, “but that some woman will drop a tear over him, and then fly into a rage with herself because the tears won’t come more readily.”

“I could cry my eyes out,” she said, “when I think of the past ; all the misery and shame, and loss and waste of everything, but the tears are not for him. His life was such a poor, squalid, unsatisfactory one, his end so desolate and horrible, that we all say, ‘God forgive him.’ But I can’t bring myself to wish that he had lived longer, even to give him more time and another chance.”

“We can easily forgive those who steal

our money or belongings," said Wrayburn, "but it is not so easy to forgive those who rob us of our heart's peace, and trouble all the pure springs of life."

"You must not think," she said earnestly, "that I am trying to work up the affectation of feelings I don't really possess. I don't want to make you believe that I'm less easily won than in truth I am. If I may speak of my affection for you, it is to tell you how grateful, how thankful, I feel for the hope and quietude you have brought to me. But you must be patient with me, for I am still a sorrowful woman."

"I do not see how it could be otherwise," said he, "with your own sad memories clinging to you. Don't fancy I resent those memories, Mary, or feel affronted by your dwelling upon them. The most, or the least, you can do for him is to remember him with pity and mercy."

"That is just why I'm so distressed," she

said quickly. "I don't feel such pity and mercy as I should."

"Nor can you make yourself feel them just because you want to, but they will grow unconsciously."

For a while they sat in thoughtful silence; then Wrayburn stood up.

"Will you put on your hat and come out with me?" he said. "I want you to show me round this town of yours, and let me see what it's like."

Mary hesitated. "The neighbours will say I am showing you round the town that they may see what *you* are like," she objected.

"And what harm if they do? We can please ourselves. Come, and we will do a little shopping. Let's see 'how much carnation ribbon a man may buy for a remuneration.'"

Mary laughed, for good humour is still more infectious than melancholy. She made

no further objection, but put on her street attire and went out with him.

Their walk lasted for an hour or two. It is doubtful whether either of them observed whither they walked, or what they passed ; and Wrayburn certainly could not have given even an approximately correct description of Longbridge town. They realized that they were together once more ; that the old cruel barriers were gone for ever ; and that they were becoming more accustomed to their novel relation. It was like a happy revival of the early days of their Swanneck friendship before ambiguities had intruded themselves. But the affectionate confidence that was now present had never existed in that former friendship. Wrayburn poured out to her all that had been in his heart when he had parted from her, believing that she had passed out of his life for ever. And she poured back to him all the hopeless grief with which she had told him the truth ; all the misery

she had borne before she could force herself to seek Loxdale ; all "the long mechanic paces to and fro" she had endured since returning to Longbridge.

When they got back, the little house was filled with the mellow lights of evening ; dusky brown and amber, dim, yet radiant. Tea was prepared in the sitting-room. Mr. Vanburgh was there in his Sunday coat. And as they entered, a very respectable-looking, gentle-faced old woman was bringing in a small silver tea-kettle.

"Betty, this is Mr. Wrayburn," Mary said, with a freedom that showed the old servant was regarded not as a household drudge, but as a participant in all family affairs.

Wrayburn held out his hand. Betty put her hard palm into his with a pleased expression.

"I hope I see you well, sir," she said, with quaint politeness. "This has been a sad house this many a day ; the Lord give you grace to work a change in it."

"I hope He will," Wrayburn answered heartily.

Betty's words were only a paraphrase of her master's, and there was something affecting in the fond anxiety with which they confided Mary's future to him.

"It is easy to see who has been the little ewe-lamb of this house," he said, smiling across at Mary.

The Vanburgh household was a very small and unpretentious one. In sinking gradually from affluence to poverty, they had wisely adapted themselves to the ways of poverty. When Mr. Vanburgh bought the house, he had converted two small rooms into one large one. This left only one sitting-room for general use, while a small room on the other side of the house served as breakfast and dining room. Old Betty was the only servant kept. There were no hot luncheons or late dinners. There was no going into society, or attempt to drag

society back again and entertain it. Every expense had been cut down to the very *minimum*. Yet there was no starved, cold, or skimped impression given. Faded gentility to some extent there was; but not that painfully obtrusive faded gentility which is always either lamenting or apologizing. There was nothing requiring apology. If the house was small, it was as neat and orderly as a house could be. All the comforts and requisites of a refined life were there, for in becoming poor Mr. Vanburgh had not ceased to be a gentleman. If visitors came, they were sure of a kindly welcome, and were offered a genuine hospitality without fuss or affectation. Consequently many visitors came, and Mr. Vanburgh and his granddaughter were held in general esteem among their neighbours, rich and poor.

Though Wrayburn's tastes were simple in the extreme, he was yet, in his own way, a

fastidious man. The things he looked for, however, are much more difficult to find than the outward semblance of elegance and intellectuality. This little house, reflecting so distinctly the character of its inmates, pleased and satisfied him. It was very much what he had expected, and was the sort of setting to Mary that he had imagined in the mental pictures with which he had indulged himself. He would have looked with great disfavour on any attempt to disguise by artifice the simplicity of an honourable poverty.

When tea was over, he produced a large box of curiosities which he had brought for Mr. Vanburgh.

“I should like to have brought you something from Columbia,” he said, as he prised the box open with chisel and hammer, “but, you see, it’s nearly a year since I left.”

There was nothing very novel or valuable

in the box. He had only got a lot of things together at the last moment, remembering what Mary had said about the old gentleman's predilection for foreign things. A good many pretty trifles, some good of their kind, others worthless, he had bought from the Chinese in San Francisco. Then there were specimens of quartz, shells, pampas grass, photographs, botanical specimens, trinkets, ornaments and weapons from Fiji and the Sandwich Islands, and all the rest of the stuff that travellers bring home with them.

"That's the last of the Mohicans," Wrayburn said, laying down some Fijian feather gew-gaw.

"Grandfather, you will have work enough now on your hands for weeks, to arrange these about the house," said Mary.

"I think I shall have to build an extra room," Mr. Vanburgh replied gaily, as he fingered the crowd of things littered about

on tables, chairs, and floor. "You can't understand the delight I feel in things of this sort," he said to Wrayburn. "These Chinese things, now, with that musky, sandal-woody smell they always have, they bring up before me the whole 'gorgeous East'—pagodas, elephants, palanquins, mandarins, junks, spices, silks, ivory,—all the wonder and mystery of the Indies and the Flowery Land. Or look at these great Spanish stirrups and spurs. In this delicately worked massive silver you have the avarice, the dignity, the extravagance, and cruelty of those old Spanish colonists. And these bright, scented grass mats! Let the day be ever so cold and dreary, if I unfold these I am straightway in Fiji, basking in heat. For my idea of it is a place of perpetual sunshine, humming-birds, flowers, tree-ferns, cocoa-nut palms, coral-reefs, and the blue sky melting into a blue ocean."

The very soul of kindness looked out of

Wrayburn's eyes as Mr. Vanburgh rambled on. He saw the gallant struggle, the good old man was making to cheat himself of the knowledge that these things had come only because Mary was going. The remembrance of his own desolate days of heart-sick apathy, when he had first settled down in Swanneck, disposed him to feel compassion for any man looking forward to similar days.

He looked at Mr. Vanburgh's venerable white head, at Mary's faded pensive face ; and from these his glance turned to the family portraits upon the walls, the worn yellow hangings, the old-fashioned but once handsome furniture. All told the one tale of better days, of deep suffering, of self-sacrifice, of patience. What beauty and virtue, he thought, had arisen from and clustered around a hardened heart, an unprincipled character, an unholy career, a penal woe ! Who should say that evil was

not in itself a potentiality of goodness? All the rest of the evening he was more thoughtful and less alert. The family history seemed to unfold itself to him from every part of the room. The thought of the old man's lonely, unrequited heart filled him with compunction.

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